Religion, Politics, Culture

Commonweal

OCTOBER 2021

The Other Afghanistan

Images from beyond the battlefield
Solmaz Daryani

PLUS

Phil Klay on
'humane' warfare

Jim Sleeper on
race and politics

Andrew Bacevich on
the 'forever war'

$6.95 US/$7.50 CAN
COMMONWEALMAGAZINE.ORG

CONVERSATION STARTER SERIES

A discussion guide for local communities

Complete series ($25) and individual topics ($5) are available for download.

Visit **cwlmag.org/css**

The 2021-2022 CSS is Here!

Commonweal's **Conversation Starter Series** is an ideal discussion guide for fostering thoughtful dialogue in your classroom, parish, book club, or Commonweal Local Community.

Each topic of the series has been chosen by *Commonweal*'s editors and writers, and includes all the resources you need: an introduction to the topic, reading materials, discussion questions, and suggestions for further reading. This year's series features, among others, **Paul Moses on right-wing Catholic media, Carmen M. Nanko-Fernández on *Fratelli tutti*, and John Gehring on Joe Biden & U.S. Catholicism**.

TOPICS INCLUDE:

1. *Joe Biden & American Catholicism*
2. *Fratelli Tutti*
3. *The End of American Exceptionalism*
4. *Mental Health & Solidarity*
5. *The Preferential Option for the Marginalized*
6. *The Rise of Right-wing Catholic Media*
7. *AI & the Internet*
8. *Art, Beauty, & Meaning*

Learn more and download the CSS at **cwlmag.org/css**

Religion, Politics, Culture

Commonweal

OCTOBER 2021 ▪ VOLUME 148 ▪ NUMBER 9

FALL BOOKS

COVER DESIGN
David Sankey

COVER IMAGE
Solmaz Daryani

Ghoncha, who is eleven years old, carries washed dishes on her head. Every day she walks to a small canal about five hundred yards from her village. "When the water is murky and low in the canal because of extreme heat and drought, I have to wash my clothes several times and spend more time on washing clothes and dishes."

Commonweal
FOUNDED IN 1924

Commonweal [ISSN 0010-3330], a review of religion, politics, and culture, is published monthly, except for a single July-August issue, by the Commonweal Foundation, 475 Riverside Drive, Rm. 405, New York, NY 10115. Telephone: (212) 662-4200. Email: editors@commonwealmagazine.org. Fax: (212) 662-4183. POSTMASTER: send address changes to *Commonweal*, P.O. Box 348, Congers, NY 10920-0348.

LETTERS

Unpacking the interwar years

LESS THAN A LOVE FEST

Regarding the interview with John Ghazvinian ("Iran and America," June 2021), I would like to draw attention to the interwar years of 1919 to 1939, what Ghazvinian calls a "golden summer" of diplomacy between the two countries—a "bit of a love fest." U.S. State Department reports, however, tell another story.

At the center of this story is Reza Khan, the founder of the Pahlavi dynasty, who came to power in 1921 and was crowned shah in 1925. The State Department accounts of his self-aggrandizement, rapaciousness, and cruelty are extensive. By 1932, Reza Shah was the country's largest landholder—the result of his seizing tribal lands, including one divestiture of seven thousand pastures, villages, and hamlets. In 1933 the U.S. minister reported on the shah's "maniacal personal avarice"; Reza Khan funneled $100 million of the $150 million in oil royalty payments to his European accounts.

Reports of Reza Shah's cruelty also abound. In 1932 the minister wrote that "there is no end to the stories one hears of Reza Shah's personal cruelty," indiscriminately dealt to government officials, ministers, sheiks, chauffeurs, butlers, and cooks. His chief parliamentary clerical opponent, Sayyid Hassan Modarres, was removed from office in 1928, sent into exile, and died in 1937 at the age of eighty-five, possibly from poisoning.

It is true that Reza Shah helped modernize Iran—constructing roads and rail lines, expanding the grids for telecommunications and electricity, building modern manufacturing plants, extending educational opportunities, and increasing medical care. Ghazvinian notes that by the 1930s the United States was Iran's third largest trading partner. But at what cost?

Understanding American-Iran relationships requires a close look at the interwar years. To do so, one might even go back to the assassination of U.S. Vice Consul Robert Imbrie in Iran in July 1924. A year earlier the U.S Consul in Tehran had described Reza Khan as a man of "uncontrolled passions," who might create "an incident with far reaching results." The day of Imbrie's murder Reza Khan conveniently declared martial law. One report of Imbrie's murder described Persian relief that the victim was "only an American." The interwar years is not a story of a "love fest" between two nations. The Ghazvinian interview, although not his book, oversimplifies this relationship and could easily lead to misunderstanding of a country three times the size of France dating back 2,700 years.

Susan M. Stein
Omaha, Nebr.

DISREGARDED

I read the article "Still Unaccommodated" (July/August 2021) with interest. My parish (St. Mary's in Seattle) has become an example of how Spanish-speaking Catholics are disregarded by the Church. We are a bilingual community (about one-third English-speaking and two-thirds Spanish-speaking) that has worked since the mid-1980s to include all parishioners in parish life and leadership. Communications and catechesis are in both Spanish and English.

Unfortunately, these gains have been eroded in the past several years by an archbishop-appointed pastoral leader who has undermined many of the gains that we made over twenty-five years. The archdiocese is planning to close St. Mary's and merge us with an adjoining parish. As more details came out, we found that

Commonweal
FOUNDED IN 1924

PUBLISHER
Thomas Baker

BUSINESS MANAGER
James Hannan

VICE PRESIDENT OF ADVANCEMENT
Adrianna Melnyk

ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER
Milton Javier Bravo

MISSION & PARTNERSHIPS DIRECTOR
Claudia Avila Cosnahan

MARKETING MANAGER
Gabriella Wilke

ADVERTISING
Regan Pickett
commonwealads@gmail.com
(703) 346-8297

SUBSCRIPTIONS
commonwealmagazine.org/subscribe
(845) 267-3068

LEARN MORE

Follow us on
@commonwealmag
facebook.com/commonwealmagazine
@commonwealmagazine

Subscribe to our newsletter for free twice-weekly emails from our editors
cwlmag.org/newsletter

Send a letter to the editor:
letters@commonwealmagazine.org

STUDENTS/TEACHERS

Free subscriptions for students and recent graduates
cwlmag.org/freestudent

Editorial internships
cwlmag.org/interns

Teachers, would you like free resources for the classroom?
cwlmag.org/educators

LETTERS

the proposed parish would not have a Spanish-language Mass, nor is its church large enough to accommodate the Spanish-speaking members. When we pointed this out to the archdiocese, it became apparent that they intended only English speakers to be merged, splitting the community. Archdiocesan representatives even suggested that Spanish-speaking parishioners could move to any parish that they wanted. Obviously, there was no plan for our fellow Spanish-speaking members.

These actions bear out that Spanish-speaking Catholics are not treated as equal members. In our case the ill-treatment includes intentionally weakening and closing a parish that made continuing and long-term changes to value all parishioners, regardless of language.

Steve Wittmann-Todd
Seattle, Wash.

KEEPING THE SABBATH HOLY

Regarding Mollie Wilson O'Reilly's article "Much Obliged" (September 2021): I take real exception to Cardinal Dolan's unilateral definition of what defines making the Sabbath holy. I do take seriously our obligation to take time to bring ourselves into God's presence, especially on the Sabbath. But that may take many forms. During the pandemic year (and, sadly, beginning again with the uptick in cases) my husband and I created our own way of keeping Sunday holy. Watching a Mass online did not appeal to us, so we routinely sat down and read the Lectionary readings and shared what we heard in them. We also used an excellent guide: *Breaking Open the Lectionary* by Margaret Nutting Ralph, whose scholarship added context and nuance. These mornings have been the most spiritually fruitful and fulfilling of our forty-four years together. No, there was no Eucharist, but God was in our midst.

Mary Lu Callahan
Iowa City, Iowa

FOUND IN TRANSLATION

I so enjoyed Cathleen Kaveny's article describing her experience reading Augustine in Latin ("Ancient, But Ever New," July/August 2021). It seems that English has overtaken global communications and, with translations readily available, foreign-language study has declined irrespective of the discipline pursued.

The greater loss, however, is the gift of being able to read a text in the language of its author. The author's choice of words, grammatical structure, and writing style cannot be appreciated in translation, which is the work of another person inhabiting a different culture at another time. Even good translations cannot transmit the nuances of the author's language. We are poorer when we're reduced to reading for content alone.

It was only after studying Italian through 400-level courses that I appreciated the gift of reading in an author's language. Prof. Kaveny's ability to read Augustine in his own words impressed me. *Latina non est facilis!* Brava!

Annette Sansone
Depew, N.Y.

CELEBRATING THE DOMINICAN RITE

The photo on page 15 of the September 2021 *Commonweal* is labeled "A Tridentine Mass." I think, though, that it is more likely a Dominican Rite Mass, which isn't the same thing. The Dominican Rite was suppressed after Vatican II but is occasionally still celebrated. One of the two servers behind the celebrants is wearing a Dominican habit with a surplice, and I suspect that the other two servers off to the side are wearing the same, although it is unclear. The Mass is obviously taking place in the chapel of a religious order; note the choir stalls, still used by Dominicans. It is hard to believe that a Dominican, nostalgic for a past that he may once have experienced or that in fact he never experienced, would celebrate a Tridentine Mass rather than a Dominican Rite one, if given the option.

Boniface Ramsey
New York, N.Y.

Reckoning with Guantánamo

Nearly eight hundred people have passed through the Guantánamo Bay prison camp since the United States opened it in January 2002. Twenty years after 9/11 and more than a month after the withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan, thirty-nine detainees are still there. In all that time only twelve have been charged with war crimes, and ten of those are still awaiting trial. The others are held in what's known as indefinite law-of-war detention: they have been imprisoned, in some cases for decades, without being charged with anything, and even the handful approved for release to other countries continue to languish without a date set for their transfer. The glaring injustice of the situation at Guatánamo Bay presented Russian President Vladimir Putin with the opportunity to criticize the United States on human rights after his meeting with President Joe Biden in June: "Guantánamo is still open. This is contrary to all imaginable rules, to international law or American laws, but it is still functioning."

President George W. Bush declared in 2002 that Guantánamo would house "the worst of the worst," but in fact it has also housed the innocent and thus become a lasting symbol of America at its worst. Of the hundreds sent there in the early days of the war on terror, many were held on flimsy evidence or none at all. Some were tortured, before and after their arrival, and some offered false confessions under duress. The Bush administration rushed to formulate novel legal reasons for suspending due process, reclassifying the detained as enemy combatants to be tried not in U.S. civilian courts but at Guantánamo before hastily established "military commissions." Though the Supreme Court invalidated some of these measures, and the use of torture was eventually discontinued, the Obama administration eased off its original promise to end unlimited detention. For its part, Congress has passed several measures preventing Guantánamo prisoners from being transferred to the United States for trial. Lawmakers worry that the American judicial system, with its emphasis on due process, might be too fair to guarantee conviction, and that open testimony would reveal embarrassing information about coerced confessions, tainted evidence, and the inhumane conditions under which detainees have been held.

That helps explain the status of the five men held on charges of plotting the 9/11 attacks, including alleged mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, who have been in custody for more than eighteen years. They were arraigned in 2012, and since then there have been forty-two pretrial hearings to sort through the legal complications arising from the ad hoc military commissions, and from the fact that the accused face the death penalty. There has also been a revolving door of presiding military judges, the latest of whom was appointed in August but needs time to become familiar with filings and court records reaching back years. Pandemic-related restrictions have added further delays, keeping attorneys from traveling to Guantánamo (defendants are not allowed to communicate with their lawyers by video or phone). Jury selection still has not begun, which means a trial is at least a year away, and there is no telling when a verdict might be reached. It's reasonable to think that trying the defendants in civilian courts in the United States—as the Obama administration sought to do in 2009—could have expedited matters. In his recent book, *Reign of Terror: How the 9/11 Era Destabilized America and Produced Trump*, Spencer Ackerman makes a useful comparison to the case of Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh. McVeigh was indicted, tried, and convicted in less than two years, bringing not only swift justice but also closure for families of the victims.

Meanwhile, Guantánamo detainees are aging, their physical health declining even as the psychological trauma associated with indefinite detention and isolation grows worse. (Since Guantánamo opened, seven detainees have died by suicide.) Indeed, the more time that passes, the greater the likelihood that detainees will grow old and die at Guantánamo, something the Pentagon has acknowledged by its plans to retrofit the facility as a nursing home, envisioning its continued use through 2043.

By then Guantánamo will have been operating for over forty years. It's as unimaginable as it is unconscionable, but no more so than the fact that it was ever allowed to open in the first place. The Biden administration has announced an interagency review aimed at closing Guantánamo by 2025, but specific measures should be taken now to set release dates for those who have not been charged with anything, and to get moving on fair trials for the accused. A group of senators has urged Biden to re-establish the Special Envoy for the Closure of Guantánamo and to restore related State Department positions eliminated by Donald Trump, which could help speed repatriation efforts that he brought to a halt as president. There are also legal mechanisms for securing plea agreements from detainees against whom there is sufficient untainted evidence, and for sentencing those convicted of non-capital crimes to imprisonment in their home countries.

With the war in Afghanistan over, it is time for the United States to admit fully the grievous mistakes it made in opening and operating Guantánamo, and to apologize for what has been allowed to occur there. Of course, this will not erase Guantánamo's shameful legacy. But it might make us think twice before making the same mistakes again.

—September 22, 2021

The Vaccine Mandate

On September 9, President Joe Biden announced that his administration would be requiring vaccination for all federal workers and contractors, and for health-care workers at hospitals and other facilities that receive Medicare or Medicaid. The administration would also require any company with a hundred or more employees to ensure that their workers are vaccinated or tested weekly. Nine months after the Food and Drug Administration authorized the first vaccine against COVID-19 for emergency use, more than 175 million Americans have been fully vaccinated. But an estimated 80 million Americans who are eligible for the vaccines—now fully approved by the FDA—have yet to receive their first shot. After a summer of gently encouraging Americans to get a "safe, effective, and free" vaccine, Biden decided it was time to stop indulging persistent "vaccine resistance." The new rule, which would affect almost two-thirds of the private-sector workforce, is designed to bring down the number of infections, keep our hospitals from being overwhelmed, and help get the whole country back to work.

The news that the federal government would be creating vaccine requirements for the private sector drew immediate backlash from Republican governors: Gov. Kay Ivey of Alabama called the mandate "outrageous" and "overreaching"; Gov. Greg Abbott of Texas called it a "power grab" and "an assault on private businesses"; and Gov. Tate Reeves of Mississippi—a state that does not allow religious or conscientious objections to mandatory vaccinations for schoolchildren—called it an "unconstitutional move" that the president had "no authority" to make. (All three states, like every other state in the country, already mandate other vaccines for children and, in some cases, for adults.) While prominent Republican leaders like Sen. Mitch McConnell have acknowledged the efficacy of the vaccine and urged their constituents to get the shots, some still object to what they see as an unconstitutional overreach.

The Supreme Court has previously upheld vaccine mandates, notably in the 1905 case of *Jacobson v. Massachusetts*, in which the defendant claimed that "a compulsory vaccination law is unreasonable, arbitrary, and oppressive." In his majority opinion, Justice John Marshall Harlan wrote that "the liberty secured by the Constitution of the United States to every person within its jurisdiction does not import an absolute right in each person to be, at all times and in all circumstances, wholly freed from restraint." *Jacobson* and, later, *Zucht v. King*, upheld state and city vaccine mandates. In lieu of testing the constitutionality of a national mandate, Biden opted instead to make use of established presidential powers granted by Congress.

His plan calls for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to issue the rule ordering large businesses to mandate vaccination or weekly testing by using an emergency provision in the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 to ensure a safe workplace. OSHA's rule-making power is based on the federal government's constitutional authority to regulate interstate commerce. Rather than asbestos or other toxic chemicals, the workplace hazard in this case "is the infectious worker," says epidemiologist and Obama-era OSHA director David Michaels. "This rule will tell employers: You have to take steps to make sure potentially infectious workers don't come into the workplace."

The new rule, whose details are still being sorted out, probably will not take effect until November, but employers are already making plans to implement it, as they do all other OSHA requirements. And while some large businesses worry the mandate might cause vaccine-resistant workers to leave for jobs at smaller companies exempt from the federal mandate, others, including groups like the Business Roundtable, have welcomed the move as a first step toward restoring full confidence in an economy still hobbled by the fear of a deadly disease.

—Katie Daniels

The Travesty in Texas

On September 1, the U.S. Supreme Court refused to block a Texas law from taking effect that, as *Slate* legal analyst Mark Joseph Stern summarized it, "succeeded for the first time in almost half a century in outlawing almost all abortions in a state." The legislation bans the procedure at about six weeks into a pregnancy, when the bill's proponents claim that a "fetal heartbeat" can first be detected. Because most people don't realize they are pregnant by then, the new law makes legal abortions practically impossible to obtain in Texas.

The most extraordinary—and, frankly, disturbing—feature of the Texas anti-abortion bill is its enforcement mechanism. The government is explicitly forbidden from enforcing the legislation. Instead, the law creates a bounty-hunter system that deputizes private citizens to bring civil suits against anyone who performs or aids with an abortion. As the *New York Times* reported, this includes "doctors, nurses, insurance companies, even Uber drivers who help take women to clinics." There are virtually no limits on who has the standing to bring such a suit—a person doesn't even have to live in Texas to do so. If successful, the plaintiff is promised a $10,000 reward; if the plaintiff loses, the law specifically exempts him or her from having to pay damages or the legal fees of the wrongly accused. These provisions are not only deeply unfair, tilted mightily toward empowering plaintiffs; they could inflict cruelty on pregnant people at their most vulnerable. Imagine a pregnant person

who has a miscarriage—and an abusive partner who refuses to believe them.

Why would the Texas legislature contrive such a vicious way to enforce abortion restrictions? Aside from the pleasures of cruelty, its design is meant to help it survive a challenge in the courts. That's worked so far: the majority opinion in September's Supreme Court ruling cited the "complex and novel" procedural questions involved for its reluctance to provide an injunction against the law—the majority were just deferring to a state legislature in the midst of supposed befuddlement. But Justice John Roberts was right to reject such reasoning. In his dissent, he described the Texas law's statutory scheme as "unprecedented" and noted that he believed preliminary relief should have been granted "to preserve the status quo ante—before the law went into effect—so that the courts may consider whether a state can avoid responsibility for its laws in such a manner." Justice Sonia Sotomayor went further. Calling her colleagues' decision "stunning" and "untenable," she offered what should have been the most obvious rejoinder to the Texas legislature's gambit: "It cannot be the case that a State can evade federal judicial scrutiny by outsourcing the enforcement of unconstitutional laws to its citizenry."

For now, at least, abortion laws as restrictive as Texas's *are* unconstitutional, and it is reckless to try to avoid that reality by turning the state's citizenry into a network of informants. People of goodwill, including those opposed to abortion, should condemn this law.

—Matthew Sitman

Botching Biden's Agenda

The Democrats' $3.5 trillion budget-reconciliation bill is now under consideration in Congress. A key piece of President Joe Biden's legislative agenda, the Build Back Better Act would advance important Democratic priorities in the areas of health care, taxation, education, and energy.

It would provide subsidies for more Americans to get Medicaid coverage. It would allow Medicare to negotiate with pharmaceutical companies for lower drug prices, while expanding the program to provide hearing, vision, and dental benefits. In the education sector, the bill includes provisions for universal pre-kindergarten and tuition-free community college. It would guarantee twelve weeks of paid family and medical leave to most working Americans and make the temporary child tax credit permanent. It would make in-home health care more affordable, while also increasing the pay of caregivers. It would combat global warming with subsidies for renewable energy and new penalties for companies that pollute. Finally, it would address the nation's housing crisis with new funding for public housing, housing vouchers, and investments in the construction of affordable housing.

Taken together, these policies have the potential to make real improvements in the lives of many Americans. Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), a major supporter of the Build Back Better Act, called it "the most consequential piece of legislation for working people in the modern history of this country."

To pay for its massive spending increases, the bill proposes $2.9 trillion worth of tax increases for corporations and wealthy Americans. These would have the effect of undoing most of President Trump's 2017 tax cuts, as well as closing loopholes that mainly benefit the rich.

Republicans have strongly denounced the bill as "wasteful," warning that it will increase the budget deficit, inflation, and unemployment. But the bill also faces opposition from moderate Democrats like Sen. Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.) and Sen. Kyrsten Sinema (D-Az.). Both have balked at the enormous cost of the bill; Manchin has said that he would prefer a bill that spends about half as much money. Moderates in both houses of Congress have taken aim at measures to combat climate change and—despite its wide popularity among the American people—the provision that would allow Medicare to negotiate lower drug prices.

Since the bill's drafting, lobbyists working on behalf of pharmaceutical and fossil-fuel companies, among other lucrative industries, have been deployed to kill parts of the bill that would threaten their profits. At *New York* Magazine, Jonathan Chait has detailed the efforts of lobbyists who, sometimes without disclosing their interests, write op-eds and appear on cable-news shows to spread lies about how tax increases will affect the middle class. Such efforts need to peel away only a single Democrat in order to keep the Build Back Better Act from passing the Senate. (Without the filibuster, Democrats could pursue some of these policies outside the reconciliation process, but the same Democratic senators standing in the way of the reconciliation bill have thwarted efforts to eliminate the filibuster.)

It would be a shame if this historic bill died because of lobbyists and so-called centrists who care more about campaign donations than public opinion. Many of these reforms—paid family leave, increased taxes on the wealthy, investment in renewable energy—are widely popular, and would do real good for those who are struggling to keep up with their rent and the skyrocketing prices of medical care and higher education. Republican opposition to a bill of this kind is to be expected, but if Democrats fail to implement the most popular parts of their agenda while they still have the chance, they will have no one to blame but themselves—and they can expect voters to punish them for it at the polls.

—Regina Munch

A student receives a COVID-19 vaccine at the University of Memphis, July 22, 2021.

MICHAEL PEPPARD

Persuading Anti-vaxxers

Let's start with better analogies.

How is Obamacare like eating broccoli? Or how is a virtuoso violinist like an unplanned pregnancy? If you've taken a philosophy class or studied Supreme Court cases, you've heard famous analogies like these. There's an august history of moral reasoning by metaphor and analogy. We do this when presented with a new moral question or when trying to reframe an old one.

During the battle against COVID-19, we've compared the pandemic to natural disasters like wildfires and societal disasters like war. (We can slip the metaphor "battle" in there without even thinking about it, as I just did.) We've also compared it to past pandemics and other, more familiar infectious diseases, with surprisingly little effect on Covid skeptics.

In the ongoing push to persuade the vaccine-hesitant, both sides have tried out analogies for vaccines. Some of those opposed to vaccination campaigns have grotesquely compared vaccine certifications to anti-Semitic gold-star badges or other fascist methods of social control. Meanwhile, proponents of vaccination have compared vaccines to mandatory seat belts in cars—not the worst analogy, perhaps, but not the best either.

Andy Slavitt, the former White House Senior Advisor for Covid response, recently described the vaccine as an "umbrella" during a rainstorm: yes, the vaccinated will get a little bit wet, but they'll stay mostly dry. Developing his metaphor, Slavitt says the Delta variant is like a more powerful storm, with "the slanty kind" of rain—you'd still rather have an umbrella, right? The storm analogy helps dramatize the all-encompassing and dynamic nature of the pandemic, but the umbrella analogy captures only the self-protective aspect

CNS PHOTO/KAREN PULFER FOCHT, REUTERS

of vaccination. My umbrella doesn't help everyone in my community stay dry, just as my seat belt doesn't make a dangerous intersection safer. To overcome vaccination hesitancy, public-health officials need better analogies—ones that help us see vaccination as a kind of collective action.

In my own attempts to persuade vaccine skeptics, I've found that one of the main obstacles is the basic idea of limiting one's freedoms for the common good. I often discuss this category of moral reasoning with students in my courses on religion and politics. I've also encountered deep distrust of government mandates. But people tend to have more trust in government the closer it is to home: village, town, county. As an elected official to municipal office, I've often been amazed to learn how many little regulations we have for public health and safety.

This summer, while trying to come up with more persuasive imagery for epidemiology and vaccination, I've played around with the analogy to public swimming pools. We have all kinds of rules at public pools—appropriate dress, walking instead of running, and not entering the pool with open wounds. Also, you can't poop in it. We accept these rules without hesitation. We understand without difficulty that if someone's body is emitting something potentially harmful to you, you don't want to swim around in it.

Every analogy allows us to see something more clearly, but also obscures something else. The pool analogy obscures the fact that Covid can spread from asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic carriers of the virus. It also obscures the self-protective function of vaccination: people who break the pool rules are not exposing themselves to mortal dangers.

A better analogy would have the following characteristics: something that already exists, is honored by custom or imposed by the government, and protects both my health and that of others in potentially deadly circumstances. Yes, I know we have *other vaccines* that fit the bill. But many of the people we need to convince are skeptical about other vaccines, too. So what other analogy might do the job?

Imagine a city where more than a third of the population feel free to run red lights; that is where we are now with the pandemic.

Let's consider something else that local and state governments regulate: traffic. In a natural environment or premodern society, traffic laws are unnecessary. But when we have population density and high-speed mobility, such laws are ubiquitous. They offer essential protection against serious injury and death. For good reason, New York Mayor Bill de Blasio's signature public-health initiative has been the Vision Zero campaign to limit traffic deaths.

At a busy intersection, if most people ignore the traffic lights, chaos and injury ensue. If 99 percent of people obey them, things go very well. And in reality, the number is closer to 100 percent, because every adult has either had a scary car accident or knows someone who has. And haven't we all by now had a close encounter with Covid?

Traffic lights are a widespread limitation on individual freedom for the common good. "Ordered liberty," as conservatives used to say. If someone runs a red light, they risk not only their own life but also the lives of everyone around them. A person may think the coast is clear or the light is unnecessary, but they can't see everything at the intersection. That's why the light was put there.

Like vaccines, traffic lights come from a partnership of private industry and government. There are tons of boring studies commissioned prior to a new light signal. Some town, county, or state transportation committee spent at least a year on it before you were required to obey it. There is even a kind of clinical trial of the light once it is in place; if it doesn't have the intended effect—or has unintended effects that are worse than the original problem—it is removed.

It turns out that even our most libertarian citizens have basic trust in these government-managed traffic lights. Sure, they can be a minor nuisance. But they nearly always work to prevent harm and increase freedom. Do they limit our freedom each time we see a red light? Yes. But do they increase our *overall* freedom? Yes. They increase our freedom not to be hospitalized or killed by a collision, our freedom to cross the street with a toddler, our freedom to travel without fear. They both reflect and create the public trust from which greater freedom grows.

They're not flawless. When we sense danger, we're more cautious; we look both ways before crossing. We still know that "breakthrough" accidents happen. We wear seat belts and buy cars with airbags, just in case. But on the whole we trust traffic signals to manage our collective-action problem, and we do not want to live in a dense and mobile society without them.

The same is true of vaccines: they aren't perfect, but they do increase freedom overall by preventing death and serious disease. Yet they only do this if everyone, or nearly everyone, gets vaccinated. Imagine a city where more than a third of the population feel free to run red lights; that is where we are now with the pandemic.

MICHAEL PEPPARD *is a professor of theology at Fordham University and a trustee of the Village of Pleasantville, New York.*

MASSIMO FAGGIOLI

Hope & Hesitancy

Letter from Italy

Returning to Italy to see family after a two-year hiatus made clear to me how far apart Europe and the United States have grown. In the summer of 2021, flying across the Atlantic not only demanded patience in complying with varying Covid testing requirements and distancing protocols; it also meant worrying about a virus (and its variants) that still wasn't fully under control. But it's not just the pandemic that has widened the gap. Italy and the United States are like two cousins struggling to recognize one another after a particularly painful separation, in this case a rupture with a clear and immediate cause: the Trump presidency. A longtime friend, the mayor of a city vital to the Italian tourism industry, told me, "Once it was clear that America would always be there for Italy and for Europe. Now, we don't know."

Italy, of course, was the first country in the West to face the full ravages of COVID-19. Recall the infection rates and death tolls of February and March of 2020, the images of a vacant St. Peter's Square, exhausted health-care workers, and bodies awaiting burial. Just over eighteen months later, there are signs of recovery and revival. Consider the performance of Italian athletes at this summer's Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics—the best in the country's history, with more competitors than ever coming from different racial and cultural backgrounds, representing a country that still denies citizenship to kids born and raised in Italy by parents who are not Italian citizens. There was also Italy's July victory over England in the European soccer championship game at Wembley Stadium in London. The *Azzurri* had won the European title only once before, in 1968. For Italians, the national soccer team's successes are often linked to significant historical moments, regardless of the political regime. They become part of the collective narrative. Mussolini expertly exploited world championship victories in 1934 and 1938, as well as Italy's gold-medal victory at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, turning them into symbols of Italy's newfound international prestige. The 1968 European championship win represented a unifying moment for a country riven by deep political and generational divisions and helped rehabilitate the image of the tricolor national flag that, after long being associated with the nationalist rhetoric of the neo-fascist Movimento Sociale Italiano party, was waved in the streets and squares in widespread celebration. The World Cup victory over Germany in 1982 was seen as a turning of the

Pope Francis blesses an empty St. Peter's square, March 15, 2020.

ABACA PRESS/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Italy and the United States are like two cousins struggling to recognize one another after a particularly painful separation.

page after a decade of political turmoil and domestic terrorism known as the "years of lead." And because of Brexit, this summer's victory over England had wider political overtones; it seemed as if Italy, one of the founding nations of the European Union, was basically saying good riddance to the U.K. on behalf of the rest of its members.

It's not just sport that gives Italy hope. This year it chaired the G20 (nineteen countries plus the EU, accounting for 90 percent of global GDP, 80 percent of global trade, and 66 percent of the world's population); in October, it will host the summit of G20 leaders in Rome. And though it may be a while before non-Europeans visit Italy again in large numbers, tourism is slowly coming back.

But economic and political uncertainty remains. The seven-year term of President Sergio Mattarella expires in January 2022, and he says he will not serve a second. (He just turned eighty, and in the history of the Italian Republic, no president has served two terms.) The Italian presidency is a position similar to that of a constitutional monarch, and in the recent past presidents have helped keep the Italian political system from succumbing completely to right-wing populism and, before that, Berlusconism. Queen Elizabeth II could not stop Brexit, but in May 2018, Mattarella stopped the populist government of the Five Star Movement from implementing policies leading towards an exit from the eurozone. He is also one of the last—if not *the* last—of the generation of Vatican II Catholic politicians. He has offered steady moral leadership during the pandemic, a time during which the sovereignty of Parliament, the rule of law, and the relationship between church and state have been tested in ways not seen since the 1970s, or even World War II.

In early 2023, the term of the current Parliament expires, and even this far out many observers already believe the election could tilt to hard-right candidates, with a new prime minister leading a coalition of parties focused on nationalism and immigration and animated by resentment toward the EU. If this bears out, it would be a case of déjà vu, ten years after the populist insurgency against the technocratic government then led by Mario Monti, an economist known for his role in the institutions overseeing the economic policies of the European Union. Since the beginning of this year, the government has been led by another well-known technocrat with an EU background, Mario Draghi, chairman of the European Central Bank from 2011 to 2019 and savior of the euro. Indeed, Draghi has a true globalist pedigree, having served as vice chairman and managing director for Goldman Sachs from 2002 to 2005 and boasting connections to Harvard, Princeton, and the Brookings Institution. (He's also a graduate of a prestigious Jesuit high school in Rome.)

Draghi replaced Giuseppe Conte, an Italian law professor at the University of Florence nominated by the populist Five Star Movement. He came into the office in large part due to a consensus belief that a true coalition was needed to deal with the pandemic, and in fact, the Draghi government is supported in Parliament by the largest coalition ever: all parties, save for one—the right-wing Fratelli d'Italia, main heir of the Italian neo-fascist conservative movement and now rising in opinion polls. Draghi's government has no long-term political project—its only aim is economic and financial stability—and in this sense it's the epitome of a technocracy built on the personal reputation of the technocrat. Italian economic and political-establishment elites wanted Draghi, and Draghi has given them what they wanted, including better relations between Italy and the European Union and normalization of foreign policy after Conte and the Five Star Movement's embrace of Trump and Putin. An added benefit: the selection of Draghi helped cut short the political life of Conte, who was seen as a potentially viable leader for Italian populism. It also illustrates something about the types of Catholicism in Italy: on one hand there is Conte's provincial upbringing and Padre Pio devotionalism, and on the other is Draghi's international stardom and his mix of Jesuit intellectual precision and Protestant ethic of capitalism, with a European flair.

But it's not clear whether Draghi's cool charisma can match the rising Right, and it has yet to halt the ongoing collapse of the institutional systems that so far have kept Italy together and out of the hands of nationalists. The Democratic Party, for example—the most important political entity on the center-left—is recovering from the years of Matteo Renzi, who was the party's national leader from 2013 to 2017 and prime minister from 2014 to 2016. After leaving government, Renzi founded his own personal party, Italia Viva, revealed his center-right inclinations, and is now cultivating a career as a consultant and public speaker for foreign potentates, including Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (who approved the assassination of *Washington Post* columnist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018), as well as for Saudi state-sponsored initiatives and think tanks. Like Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder, he has joined the jet-set of former politicians working for well-paying international clients. With little holding its various constituencies (moderate progressive, liberal and centrist Catholic, radical secular) together, the Democratic Party risks becoming a minor party, thus leaving Italian center-leftists without any politically viable representation.

Meanwhile, the populist web-based Five Star Movement, founded by comedian Beppe Grillo in 2009, is split between loyalty to Grillo and Conte. As an experiment in direct democracy, Five Star is a failure, unable to recruit politically serious people and attracting conspiracy theorists and amateurs with little grasp of the complexities of governing. Most of the votes that went to Five Star

Francis's pontificate liberated Italian Catholicism from the right-wing, culture-war inclinations of the clerical elites in the early 2000s, but it has not generated anything new in its wake.

in 2013 and 2018 (when it took 32.7 percent of the tally and won 227 seats in Parliament) will likely not go to the Left in the next election, but to the Right.

Indeed, the real question is who will lead Italy once the right presumably recaptures power: Matteo Salvini's League (formerly the Northern League), a local autonomist party that has adopted nationalism, or Giorgia Meloni's Fratelli d'Italia, which gathers former fascists, nationalists, clericalists, small-business owners, and rentiers. Both Meloni and Salvini compete for the approval of figures like Hungary's Viktor Orbán and other neo-nationalist Europeans. Both are sympathetic to anti-vaxxers (a small minority in Italy) and have long stoked fears over immigration, Islam, and European elites. But Meloni is a more disciplined politician than Salvini, and if victorious would be Italy's first female national leader. She cultivates the sympathies of Italian clericalists, but without Salvini's crass displays of devotion (crucifixes, rosaries, and a well-publicized trip to Fatima in May 2021); she is also less coarse than Salvini in her criticism of Pope Francis's position on immigration. Meloni's platform can be summed up as "God, fatherland, family": Italians-first nationalism and culture-war Catholicism, aligned not just with Orbán, but also with the anti-liberal parties in Poland and other European countries, the Likud in Israel, and Trumpism in the United States. She is more of a threat than Salvini to bring Italy into the global neo-nationalist community.

What all Italians seem to agree on is that the country needs to rethink its economy and address a host of pressing financial challenges, including a staggering national debt and the future of social security. It can no longer be so dependent on tourism—the pandemic proved that—and it must make wiser use of EU grants and subsidies. Far less clear is what the country should do in terms of foreign policy. In seeking to distance Italy from the EU, the Conte government made haphazard overtures to Russia and China, but its actual strategy (to the extent there was one) was never plain. Draghi has returned Italy to alignment with the EU and alliance with the United States, but the uncertainty of traditional American hegemony and questions over the mission of NATO still remain, even if after the chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan Italy remains one of United States' most reliable allies in Europe.

"Italy was one of the founders of the European Union 'club,' and this, in addition to an international situation different from the current one, guaranteed us respect that was greater than our economic, political, and military weight," Mario Ricciardi, editor-in-chief of the journal of politics *Il Mulino* told me. "Today things have changed a lot, there are so many new members who no longer have any awe of older members, and this doesn't always work to our advantage."

Meanwhile, the Catholic Church in Italy continues to face uncertainty about its role in the nation's political and everyday life. More than a year since the worst of the pandemic, its influence is questionable, the bishops' conference has sunk further into irrelevance, and many Italians feel free to criticize it in ways that might have been unimaginable just a few years ago. And the Vatican itself seems less able to exert the kind of political influence on national politics it once did.

Under Francis, the Vatican has been more transparent on a number of issues, including its own finances. But this has also opened an ugly chapter in the history of the "temporal" justice administered in the name of the pope, who is the absolute sovereign of Vatican City State. In July, the Vatican trial of ten people involved in a money-losing investment in a controversial London real-estate deal began. Among those being tried is Cardinal Giovanni Angelo Becciu, the first cardinal ever to be indicted by Vatican criminal prosecutors. Francis stripped him of the rights and duties of the cardinalate in September 2020. Becciu was not just the prefect of the Vatican Congregation for the Saints, but also, as the *sostituto* (or Number 2) to the Secretariat of State between 2011 and 2018, a key figure in navigating relations between the Vatican and Italy. It is hard to say what the consequences of his trial will be for the Vatican, the Italian Church, and Pope Francis.

The Church also faces challenges over how to deal with the Zan bill, anti-homophobia legislation sponsored by LGBT activist Alessandro Zan, who was elected to Parliament with the Democratic Party. Debate over the bill has led to a level of tension between Church and state not seen in years. In June, the Vatican Secretariat of State sent a diplomatic note to Italy's ambassador to the Holy See raising concerns that the bill, if approved in its present form, could limit freedom of expression of Catholics and Catholic institutions and thus breach guarantees granted to the Church in Italy in the revised Concordat of 1984. Despite clarifying that the Vatican's goal is not to stop the bill but to reformulate some passages, this rare diplomatic step raised alarms among progressives in Italy over the secularity (*laicità*) of the Republic. The majority of Italians seem to support the bill, but Catholics are divided—not on the need for a law protecting LGBTQ people from discrimination and violence, but on the possibility that it would introduce American-style "culture wars." In its present form,

the bill contains sometimes moralistic phrasing not just defining what would be illegal, but also what would be socially acceptable to say.

There's also the issue of how the Church can be involved in Italy's continued recovery from the pandemic. As the crisis ebbs and restrictions are lifted, Italy may be poised for a level of economic growth not seen in decades. The question is whether it will benefit all Italian society: economically, there is a huge gap between rich and poor, and between the north and the south. The social safety net provided by the Catholic Church remains strong, but even though it's the most important provider of social services in Italy, the Church has lost much of its cultural and political cachet, and the ability of Italian Catholics to win over legislators and entrepreneurs with the wisdom of the Catholic social doctrine has weakened. Criticizing the hierarchy has become the norm across the political spectrum: the left on gay rights, the right on immigration, the populists on the very idea of religious institutions. Old-time Italian secularism was nothing compared to the rise of new media and social-media influencers, some of them turned politicians, many turned political mischief-makers. Given this reality, it makes less sense than it ever did to envision some sort of intellectually elite grounding for a new Catholic party: it would have no electoral viability. Almost thirty years after the dissolution of the Democrazia Cristiana, very few Italian Catholics (and even fewer non-Catholics) seek a new Catholic party; even Francis himself says that he does not believe in confessional political parties.

But what this really demonstrates is the practical disappearance of the Catholic laity from political life. Lay associations (Catholic Action, Catholic boy and girls scouts, the new ecclesial movements) have lost their clout not just because of secularization, but also because of the clericalist policies of the Italian bishops during the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI. The bishops conference under the leadership of Cardinal Camillo Ruini (1991–2007) became something like a political action committee. The result has been a disaster both politically and ecclesially—the dissolution of the tradition of independence of lay Catholics in the public square. Try as he might, Francis has not been able to revive the Italian laity.

Or, at least not yet. The best thing the Catholic Church in Italy could do to address these challenges would be to hold a national synod. The most recent comparable event was in 1976. While the Italian bishops refused Francis's 2015 invitation to begin the synodal process, they gave in after his more forceful request earlier this year. Finally, preparations are underway, in conjunction with the global Catholic synodal process taking place between now and 2023. And yet it is hard not to think we have entered the declining phase of this pontificate. Francis, who invested so heavily in shaping the social and political role of the Church, lacks allies and partners both inside and beyond Italy. And if there remains the belief that Catholicism in Italy still has something to say (and a way to act) on immigration, poverty, and marginalization, there is no common movement or organizational energy to realize it. As the authors of a new book on the Italian Church and the pandemic (*Il gregge smarrito*, or *The Lost Flock*) put it: the Church "speaks but is not able to count, and when it acts it is not able to speak." Francis's pontificate liberated Italian Catholicism from the right-wing, culture-war inclinations of the clerical elites in the early 2000s, but it has not generated anything new in its wake. A national synod could lead to a movement that would benefit the Church and Italy both, even if it might not be as big a unifying event as beating England on penalty kicks.

MASSIMO FAGGIOLI *is professor of theology and religious studies at Villanova University. His most recent book is* Joe Biden and Catholicism in the United States *(Bayard). Follow him on Twitter @MassimoFaggioli.*

Eric Gill, *Safety First*, 1925

POPE FRANCIS

'Always Together'

The unfinished work of Vatican II

The following essay is adapted from the pope's preface to Fraternità—segno dei tempi: il magistero sociale di Papa Francesco *by Cardinal Michael Czerny and Fr. Christian Barone, which was published in Italy by Libreria Editrice Vaticana on September 30. The English-language version,* Siblings All, Sign of the Times: The Social Teaching of Pope Francis *will be published by Orbis Books in 2022.*

The heart of the Gospel is the proclamation of the Reign of God, in the person of Jesus himself, the Emmanuel, God-Is-With-Us. In him, God brings his project of love for humanity to fulfillment, establishing his lordship over creatures and sowing the seed of divine life in human history, transforming it from within.

Certainly the Reign of God should not be identified or confused with some earthly or political achievement. Nor should it be envisioned as a purely interior reality, one that is merely personal and spiritual, or as a promise that concerns only the world to come. Instead, Christian faith lives by a fascinating and compelling "paradox," a word very dear to the Jesuit theologian Henri de Lubac. It is what Jesus, forever joined with our flesh, is accomplishing here and now, opening us up to God the Father, bringing about an ongoing liberation in our lives, for in him the Reign of God has already drawn near (Mark 1:12–15). At the same time, for as long as we exist in this flesh, God's reign remains a promise, a deep yearning that we carry within us, a cry that arises from a creation still marred by evil, one that suffers and groans until the day of its full liberation (Romans 8:19–24).

Therefore the Reign announced by Jesus is a living and dynamic reality. It invites us to conversion, asking our faith to emerge from the stasis of an individual religiosity or from its reduction to legalism. It wants our faith to become instead a continuous and restless searching for the Lord and his Word, one that calls us each to cooperate with the work of God in different situations of life and society. In different ways, often anonymous and silent, even in the history of our failures and our woundedness, the Reign of God is coming true in our hearts and in events happening around us. Like a small seed hidden in the earth (Matthew 13:31–32), like a bit of yeast that leavens the dough (Matthew 13:24–30), Jesus brings into our life story the signs of the new life he has come to start, asking us to work together with him in this task of salvation. Every one of us can contribute to realizing the work of the Reign of God on earth, opening up spaces of salvation and liberation, sowing hope, challenging the deadly logics of egoism with the brotherly and sisterly spirit of the Gospel, dedicating ourselves in tenderness and solidarity for the benefit of our neighbors, especially the poorest.

We must never neutralize this social dimension of the Christian faith. As I mentioned also in *Evangelii gaudium*, the *kerygma* or proclamation of the Christian faith itself has a social dimension. It invites us to build a society where the logic of the Beatitudes and of a fraternal world of solidarity triumphs. The God Who Is Love, who in Jesus invites us to live out the commandment of sibling love, heals with that same love both our personal and social relationships, calling us to be peacemakers and builders of sisterhood and brotherhood among ourselves:

The proclamation of the Christian faith itself has a social dimension. It invites us to build a society where the logic of the Beatitudes and of a fraternal world of solidarity triumphs.

> The Gospel is about the kingdom of God (Luke 4:43); it is about loving God who reigns in our world. To the extent that He reigns within us, the life of society will be a setting for universal fraternity, justice, peace, and dignity. Both Christian preaching and life, then, are meant to have an impact on society (*Evangelii gaudium*, 180).

In this sense, caring for our Mother Earth and building a society of solidarity as *fratelli tutti* or siblings all are not only *not* foreign to our faith; they are a concrete realization of it.

This is the foundation of the Church's social teaching. It's not just a simple social extension of Christian faith, but a reality with a theological grounding: God's love for humanity and his plan of love—and of sisterhood and brotherhood—that he accomplishes in human history through Jesus Christ his son, to whom all believers are intimately united through the Holy Spirit.

I'm grateful to Cardinal Michael Czerny and Fr. Christian Barone, brothers in faith, for their contribution on the subject of brother- and sister-hood. I'm also grateful that this book, while intended as a guide to the encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, endeavors to bring to light and make explicit the profound link between the Church's current social teaching and the teachings of the Second Vatican Council.

This link is not always noticed, at least not at first. I'll try to explain why. The ecclesial climate of Latin America, in which I was immersed first as a young Jesuit student and then in ministry, had enthusiastically absorbed and taken possession of the theological, ecclesial, and spiritual intuitions of the Council, actualizing and enculturating them. For the youngest among us, the Council became the horizon of our belief, and of our ways of speaking and acting. That is, it quickly became our ecclesial and pastoral ecosystem. But we didn't get into the habit of reciting conciliar decrees, nor did we linger on speculative reflections. The Council had simply entered our way of being Christian and our way of "being Church"—and as life went on, my intuitions, my perceptions, and my spirituality were quite simply born out of the suggestions from the teachings of Vatican II. There wasn't much need to quote the Council's documents.

Today, after many decades, we find ourselves in a world—and in a Church—deeply changed, and it's probably necessary to make more explicit the Second Vatican Council's key concepts, its theological and pastoral horizon, its topics, and its methods.

In the first part of their valuable book, Cardinal Michael and Fr. Christian help us with this. They read and interpret the social teaching I am trying to carry out, bringing to light something a little hidden between the lines—that is, the teaching of the Council as the fundamental basis, and point of departure for the invitation I'm making to the Church and the whole world with this ideal of brotherhood and sisterhood. It's one of the signs of the times that Vatican II brings to light, and the thing that our world—our common home, in which we're called to live as siblings—most needs.

In this connection, their new book also has the merit of rereading, in today's world, the Council's intuition of an open Church in dialogue with the world. In the face of the questions and challenges of the modern world, Vatican II tried to respond with the breath of *Gaudium et spes*; but today as we follow the path marked out by the Council Fathers, we realize that there's a need not only for the Church to be in dialogue with the modern world, but, most of all, for it to put itself at the service of humanity, taking care of creation as well as announcing and working to realize a new universal sisterhood and brotherhood, in which human relations are healed of egoism and violence and are founded instead on reciprocal love, welcome, and solidarity.

If this is what today's world is asking of us—especially in a society strongly marked by imbalances, injuries, and injustices—we realize that this, too, is in the spirit of the Council, which invites us to read and listen to the signs of human history. This book also has the merit of offering us a reflection on the methodology of post-conciliar theology—a historical-theological-pastoral methodology, in which human history is the site of God's revelation. Here theology develops its orientation through reflection, and pastoral ministry incarnates theology in ecclesial and social praxis. This is why papal teachings always need to be attentive to history, and why they require the contributions of theology.

Finally, this collaboration between a cardinal and a young theologian is itself an example of how study, reflection, and ecclesial experience can be joined, and it also indicates a new method: an official voice and a young voice, together. That's how we should always journey: the magisterium, theology, pastoral praxis, official leadership. Always together. Our bonds will be more credible if in the Church we too begin to feel like we are siblings all, *fratelli tutti,* and to live our respective ministries as a service to the Gospel, the building up of the Reign of God, and the care of our common home.

Translated by Griffin Oleynick

The sun sets behind a C-17 Globemaster III at Joint Base Balad, Iraq.

U.S. AIR FORCE PHOTO/TECH. SGT. ERIK GUDMUNDSON

ANDREW BACEVICH

The Forever War Continues

Biden should rescind the Carter Doctrine.

Earlier this year, when President Biden announced his intention "to end this forever war," he was referring specifically to Afghanistan. The events of August fulfilled Biden's wish, even if not quite as neatly as he might have hoped. Twenty years after it began, the Afghanistan War concluded with an unambiguous victory for America's adversary. The Taliban fought to expel all foreign occupiers; they accomplished their aim. By comparison, the United States came up empty-handed.

Yet despite this setback, little evidence exists to suggest that the larger conflict of which Afghanistan was a part will end anytime soon. Indeed, hardly had the Taliban regained power in Kabul than the Pentagon was pivoting back to the forever war's point of origin.

Recall that, in the hierarchy of substantive U.S. interests, impoverished and landlocked Afghanistan has never ranked especially high. By comparison, for decades now, policymakers in Washington have obsessed about the oil-rich Persian Gulf.

On that score, the forever war actually dates not from September 2001 but from January 1980. That's when President Jimmy Carter used his State of the Union Address to issue a manifesto of sorts. Henceforth, Carter announced, any "attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America." Lest anyone misunderstand his meaning, he vowed that "such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force."

President Carter's dictum stands in relation to the forever war as Adam's first taste of forbidden fruit does to the fallen state of humankind: it is the Original Sin.

This Carter Doctrine, as it came to be known, derived from two crucial assumptions: first, that the American way of life depended on ensuring unfettered access to Persian Gulf oil; second, that the best way to ensure that access was through the concerted application of U.S. military power.

Even today, regardless of the serial disappointments and complications encountered since Carter drew his line in the sand, the prospect of fighting in or within some proximity of the Persian Gulf remains a centerpiece of U.S. grand strategy. While the identity of the presumed enemy has changed over time, the Carter Doctrine itself remains firmly in place.

In 1980, the "outside force" to which Carter alluded was the Soviet Union. A decade later, as the USSR disintegrated, Saddam Hussein's Iraq emerged as the primary threat. Today, with Hussein long gone and after a protracted interval of conflict against various tribes, sects, militias, and jihadist groups, the Islamic Republic of Iran provides a continuing rationale for the Carter Doctrine.

So it was that just days prior to the twentieth anniversary of 9/11, the Pentagon raised the curtain on what may well be the forever war's next chapter: The U.S. Navy announced the formation of Task Force 59, as part of the Fifth Fleet, headquartered in Bahrain. According to a breathless Pentagon press release,

> Task Force 59 will be the U.S. Navy's first employment of unmanned aerial systems (UAS), unmanned sea vessels (USV), and unmanned underwater vehicles (UUV) in numbers that combine their capabilities with manned platforms for multidomain operations in all areas of the maritime battlespace from air to below the sea with the goal of using unmanned systems that have not been used before.

Unpacking that jargon is not a task for the faint of heart. But this much seems certain: as an instrument for enforcing the Carter Doctrine, Task Force 59 is on deck to play a leading role in the forever war's next iteration. In that regard, it joins a long list of enforcement mechanisms, frequently referred to as "doctrines" in their own right, but which actually amount to little more than methods of implementation.

After 9/11, the Bush Doctrine of preventive war emphasized invasion pursuant to regime change. The results fell well short of satisfactory. Much the same applies to the 2.0 version of the Bush Doctrine, which embraced counterinsurgency in a vain effort to restore stability to countries that the United States had destabilized. Next came the Obama Doctrine with its emphasis on airstrikes and special-operations forces to reduce U.S. casualties. Now we can look forward to "multidomain operations in all areas of the maritime battlespace." Surely, some enterprising newspaper columnist will detect in the references to UAS, USV, and UUV the makings of a distinctive Biden Doctrine.

Let me suggest that we do indeed need a Biden Doctrine. But before the Fifth Fleet unleashes Task Force 59, the Biden administration would do well to address a prior question: Does Jimmy Carter's characterization of the Persian Gulf as a vital U.S. interest still hold water? In 1980, the United States was dependent upon imported oil. Today, it leads the world in oil production. In 1980, oil lubricated the American way of life. Today, preserving the American way of life requires urgent action to curb the use of oil and other fossil fuels. So while the Persian Gulf may qualify as a vital interest for some nations, it should not rank among the vital interests of the United States.

A Biden Doctrine should therefore begin by revoking the Carter Doctrine. Far from preserving the American way of life, treating the Carter Doctrine as a foundation of basic U.S. policy undermines it, diverting attention and resources from matters of greater importance, climate not least among them.

The Biden Doctrine should codify an alternative set of priorities. The text might go like this:

> The United States absolves itself of further responsibility for policing the Persian Gulf. That task properly belongs to the countries in and around the Gulf itself. The United States encourages those countries to collaborate in pursuing policies of peaceful coexistence. Should they choose otherwise, the consequences will be theirs.

In 1980, oil lubricated the American way of life. Today, preserving the American way of life requires urgent action to curb the use of oil and other fossil fuels.

> Going forward, we will prioritize matters that pose an immediate threat to American freedom and democracy. In that regard, we have more than ample work right here at home.

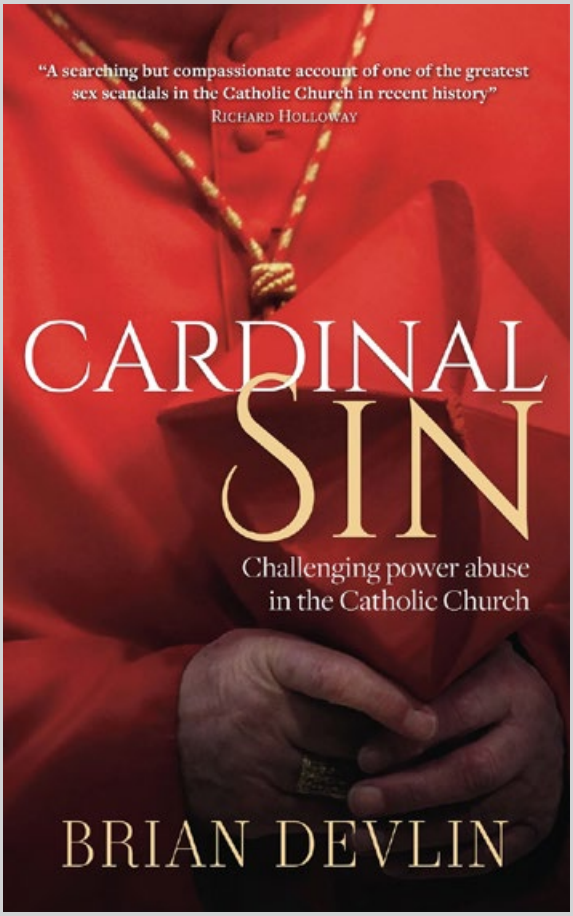
Theologians contend that Original Sin is transmitted from one generation to the next until the end of time. That principle need not apply to the Carter Doctrine. Outright absolution for sins committed pursuant to the Carter Doctrine might not be possible. But contrition and a sincere commitment to make restitution and sin no more should suffice.

As for all those expensive UAS, USV, and UUV, perhaps the Pentagon could find alternative uses. For example, with the prior agreement of affected Latin American nations, the Pentagon might consider repositioning Task Force 59 within the Amazon River Basin. For years now, the planet's most important carbon sink has suffered from various forms of abuse, including widespread deforestation. Perhaps all those high-tech platforms could be deployed to track down the culprits and repair the damage they have done—an alternative approach to multidomain operations.

ANDREW BACEVICH *is president of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft. His new book is* After the Apocalypse: America's Role in a World Transformed.

columbaBOOKS

Beautiful books to lift your Spirit



Cardinal Sin

$17.99

Challenging power abuse in the Catholic Church

Brian Devlin

Paperback | 250 PP | ISBN 9781782183846

What they're saying...

"Without courageous whistleblowers like Brian Devlin, we would never know the extent of the corruption that facilitated O'Brien and others like him."

– Mary McAleese, former President of Ireland

"A searching but compassionate account of one of the greatest sex scandals in the Catholic Church in recent history."

– Richard Holloway, former Bishop of Edinburgh, Scotland

"An excellent book which raises very important questions about the culture of clericalism and how to overcome it."

– Austen Ivereigh, Catholic journalist & papal biographer

Description

As the papal conclave that was to choose Pope Francis was being called, a cardinal of the Catholic Church was exposed and took a monumental fall from grace. Since then, many more high-profile Catholic clerics have been confronted. One of four whistle blowers, former priest Brian Devlin relates what it took to uncover the sexual hypocrisy of Cardinal Keith O'Brien in this previously untold inside story. Making the effort to write not from a place of anger and hurt, he presents *Cardinal Sin* as an opportunity for the global Church to learn and change.

With far-reaching insights, the book offers genuine lessons to help avoid future horror stories involving Catholic leaders. The author asks the hard questions, analyses the harsh responses of the Catholic hierarchy and provides ways the Church can heal and regain the trust of its faithful.

Cardinal Sin: *Challenging power abuse in the Catholic Church is a critical work for understanding how the Catholic Church does and should react when its senior figures are challenged.*

About the Author

Brian Devlin was ordained a Catholic Priest in Edinburgh in 1985. Once the announcement that Keith O'Brien would be ordained as his Archbishop, he left the priesthood to work with heroin users in Leith. After a period in AIDS prevention, Brian gained management experience in the NHS, ending up as Director of PR. He now holds various charitable and voluntary roles.

Available from www.casemateipm.com | E Book available from www.columbabooks.com

AFTER SHOWERS

("To see a World in a Grain of Sand," William Blake)

Stephen Rybicki

Within that single droplet
of rain (a loupe is needed)
Hanging precariously for the moment
at the very tip of the arrow-headed leaf
On the white-blossomed
Juneberry seen as through
his wide-angle lens or prism of some kind
which bends the light to his liking and reflects
an image focused on ground glass—
containing the entire outside world of sky
and sun and land and trees concentrated
and lying behind and beyond—

If one were only small enough to see
Inside of this moist globe
Or large enough to imagine
The earth magnified from God's seed.

STEPHEN RYBICKI *is a poet and academic librarian on the faculty of Macomb Community College, and the author of the reference work* Abbreviations: A Reverse Guide to Standard and Generally Accepted Abbreviated Forms. *He lives in Romeo, Michigan.*

Scrapping the Color Code

Jim Sleeper

A post-racial America is inevitable.

Aspirations toward an American, civic-republican identity are not determined by race, and should not be limited by it.

CNS PHOTO/ANDREW KELLY, REUTERS

Even as the murder of George Floyd unleashed a deluge of declamations about white supremacy, wokeness, critical race theory, and other American racial obsessions, a hard-won feeling of "been there, done that" kept me from jumping in. "It's difficult to say anything about race that hasn't been said before; difficult to say anything that isn't at least half true; and still more difficult to mean whatever one does say amid the fog of half-truths and euphemisms enveloping the subject," I told an interviewer for the *Atlantic* in 1997, the year I published *Liberal Racism: How Fixating on Race Subverts the American Dream.* The book's title was partly an effort to cut through that fog and find a clearer, broader understanding of what I believe is our American destiny to transcend race as we know it. *Liberal Racism* is only partly an indictment of liberals. It's also a protest against making racial identity a central organizing principle of our public life. The new U.S. Census strongly suggests that there's no longer a civic-cultural norm in "whiteness" but also that no official racial color-coding can tell us who "we" are.

I developed that conviction after 1977, when I put a new Harvard doctorate in my back pocket and left Cambridge for five years in central Brooklyn, where I was the only white tenant in an eight-unit walk-up and wrote for inner-city weeklies, the *Village Voice*, and *Dissent*. Working and living with African Americans who held some power over my prospects boiled out a Cambridge lefty's racial romanticism and left deeper interracial affinities and bonds, as I recount in *The Closest of Strangers* (1990). I explained why some well-intentioned "progressive" notions about race are wrong, if not indeed racist. I learned that my own aspirations to an American, civic-republican identity were shared pretty deeply by Black neighbors and co-workers who feel diminished by over-solicitous liberal (and ideological leftist) stereotyping almost as much as by the conservative racism that is the prime evil. Progressives who resist acknowledging this were surprised this year when many Black New York Democratic voters chose Eric Adams, a former police officer and centrist politician, over a more "woke" Black candidate as their party's mayoral nominee, as *New York Times* columnist Thomas Edsall reported.

Liberal Racism's provocative title came to me when the late Brooklyn Congressman Major Owens—a true apostle of Martin Luther King Jr.'s faith in "the content of our character" over skin color—told a small group of other leftist journalists and activists that "liberals are sometimes the worst racists." His remark got me thinking about what I'd been witnessing in my activist-journalist rounds, and *Liberal Racism* became an indictment of "political correctness," "cancel culture," and "virtue signaling," long before those terms were in vogue. A lot of what passes as racial identity politics, I wrote, "no longer curbs discrimination; it invites it. It does not expose racism. It recapitulates and, sometimes, reinvents it. Its tortured racial etiquette begets racial epithets, as surely as hypocrisy begets hostility." Many Black reviewers of the book agreed.

Working as a journalist in Brooklyn in the late 1970s, long before cell-phone cameras caught white cops killing unarmed Black youth, I knew that it was happening, and also that Black youth were killing one another. Taking a cue from Owens, I worried that many self-avowedly "anti-racist" liberals and progressives were clinging so tightly to what we now call "multiculturalist" and "woke" protocols that they'd stopped envisioning a post-racial, civic-republican culture that would be thick and rich enough for anyone to thrive in, where "people of color" would be recognized by all as bearers of virtues and rights that aren't "of color" at all. Diversity would be celebrated as a consequence of American, civic-republican fairness, not as its bureaucratic precondition. The name "Black Lives Matter" gestured in this humanist direction, almost plaintively at first, even when not all BLM supporters lived up to it. In an excerpt from *Liberal Racism* published by *Harper's*, I insisted that Blackness in America has meaning and value mainly because it's been nourished defensively against the abduction, enslavement, and ongoing murders and dispossession of Blacks by champions of a "whiteness" that seeks its own empty coherence by keeping others down.

When I was making this argument in 1997, Harvard Law Professor Randall Kennedy was warning similarly against racializing public discourse and color-coding our public policies. I endorsed Kennedy's rigorous opposition to making ethno-racial affinities a central organizing principle of American life, and I sparred in several venues with his sometime adversary and former law-school mentor Derrick Bell, a progenitor of critical race theory and a pessimist about racism whose thinking anticipated that of Ta-Nehisi Coates. Brooklyn taught me that precisely because racism is as subtly pervasive as it is brutal, it leaves both its victims and its perpetrators little margin for error in paroxysms of grievance such as those that erupted in the cases of Howard Beach, Tawana Brawley, and O. J. Simpson. No successful movement for racial and social justice can be built on lies, vilification of innocent parties, and intimidation of critics with legitimate differences of opinion.

Yet racism's ubiquity and sheer force in the daily personal experiences of Black Americans continues to drive such eruptions. The historian Jason Sokol's *All Eyes Are Upon Us* is representative of other studies showing that whites' often-sincere vows of racial fairness coexist with complicity in structural racism: Black parents who hope that a good education will bring their children closer to equality know that because public education is locally controlled, it matters where they live. But finding the right neighborhood requires getting past real-estate agents and landlords who associate the "wrong" skin color with low property values. Reassuring them requires having a good job and work habits, but that requires having a decent education. This vicious circle amounts to a kind of shell game: justice is always somewhere else. Whites on school boards or in real estate can claim to have clean hands, their actions being dictated by market necessities.

Even in self-avowedly liberal environments such as Yale, where I taught undergraduates for twenty-one years, I learned that Black students feel intense pressure not only from the outsized hopes of their families that they'll set "a good example," but also from well-meaning whites' "model minority" expectations. At the same time, however, on campuses and workplaces near high-crime areas, whites' association of Blackness with violent crime makes Black students fear not only crime itself but also the stigma of suspicion. A Black male undergraduate entering a gated college quad just behind a white female fellow student, especially after dark, must brace himself for the indignity of her quickened pace and sharp, over-the-shoulder glance. You'd have to have a heart of stone not to understand why nineteen-year-old Black and Hispanic students call out for someone or something to help them feel safe and welcome in a campus community that promised them safety and belonging.

Structural racism only reinforces the pressure: a Yale student from Tehran, where laborers and service workers don't look different from the rest of the population, told me how strange

he found it to see an overwhelmingly Black workforce serving an overwhelmingly non-Black population at Yale. At least 70 percent of the university's custodial and cafeteria workers are Black, although fewer than 8 percent of its faculty are.

Black people also observe incomprehension on the blank faces of white people who seem to regard them, sympathetically or accusingly, as survivors and residual carriers of damage about which white people may feel uneasy, or even guilty. Because the United States abducted and plunged into its midst millions of Black people even while professing "self-evident" truths about human dignity and rights, it gave them the highest imaginable stakes in getting the country to live up to its stated creed. That has made some Black people the creed's most eloquent exponents and others its sharpest critics. "In every situation you enter, your race comes with definitions and expectations you didn't expect," a Black student once told me. "It's draining. You constantly have to push through these instances of people's stupidity."

Such intrusions into every Black person's mental space would strain the moral imagination of even the rare white person who's lived or worked in an overwhelmingly Black environment, as too few white people who write about Black protests have done. Distance has also driven some white liberals and leftists into a politics of self-definition through moralistic posturing. A local chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America canceled a scheduled lecture by the Black political scientist Adolph Reed Jr. because he intended to emphasize class injustices over racial ones. Leftist "anti-racist" sectarianism does nothing to strengthen a democratic civic culture and often ends up compounding racism itself.

Yet even my own doubts about anti-racist histrionics don't explain fully my feeling of "déjà vu all over again" amid the recent protests and the new protocols. America's republic and civil society have been shaken profoundly by rising global economic, technological, cultural, demographic, and biomedical riptides that can't be blamed on racism, even when racism maldistributes their damages and rewards. We can only hope that these shocks will spur new generations of Americans to shed myopic racialist assumptions, not because racism doesn't still have its own terrifying momentum but because the other powerful forces I've just mentioned are scrambling racial distinctions as fatefully as they're scrambling sexual ones. Why don't people who tout gender and sexual fluidity question their own acceptance of sharply drawn racial identities, even as millions of biracial children change American demographics and self-understandings? The global disruptions of old racial and sexual patterns are generating yearnings for new kinds of social belonging that won't be satisfied by ethno-racial and sexual story lines that have lost their credibility.

We need new narratives—call them myths or constitutive fictions—because we remain story-telling animals, moving together through time and struggling to render our movements as "history." Young people especially need what anthropologists call "rites of passage" to adulthood—daunting tests, ratified by elders, of their prowess and dedication to intergenerational communities in their formative years. Such coming-of-age experiences induct them into full, responsible membership in society. "Contracts between us are not enforced by laws or economic incentives," explains the sociologist Alan Wolfe; "people adhere to social contracts when they feel that behind them lies a credible story of who they are and why their fates are linked to those of others." Without a credible collective story, a pluralist society loses antibodies against challenges from beyond and bureaucratized or ideological color-coding from within.

In 1920 the philosopher George Santayana noted that Americans "have all been uprooted from their several soils and ancestries and plunged together into one vortex, whirling irresistible in a space otherwise quite empty. To be an American is of itself almost a moral condition, an education and a career." Precisely because the United States has become racially, ethnically, and religiously more complex than institutional color-coding can comprehend, we should be working overtime on narratives, principles, habits, and bonds that transcend racial groupism. While Santayana was imagining America's whirling vortex a century ago, the republic was generating a civic-republican ethos—albeit mostly for whites—that the literary historian Daniel Aaron characterized as "ethical and pragmatic, disciplined and free." That balancing of ethical and pragmatic calculations has been advanced, with a bit of fakery and faith, by people as different as the novelist Ralph Ellison and the actor Jack Nicholson. Americans embody the ethos sketched by Aaron when, for example, members of a jury suspend their varied ethno-racial preconceptions to work together at judging defendants and victims according to transracial standards of fact and law.

Recently, though, new disruptions have unsettled this ethos. When talking about racial identity, conservatives and progressives have switched sides. Before World War II united Americans against fascist racism, conservative elites sought order and stability by keeping every ethno-racial group in its place, with a label on its face: Anglo-Saxon leaders treated even other whites as members of subordinate races—Slavic, Celtic, Hebrew, Italian, and so on. People of color were kept separate and suppressed. Liberals and leftists struggled to strengthen individuals' freedom from such preconceptions and defensive group reactions. At the peak of this liberal civic vision in the early 1970s, the Smothers Brothers crooned "The Lord Is Colorblind" to what CBS producers must have assumed was a reasonably receptive American audience.

Sometime in the 1980s, conservatives, too, proclaimed themselves colorblind, often unctuously and hypocritically, insisting that the only color that really mattered to them was dollar green. Many liberals, by contrast, began to bow to the older conservative racialist assumption—rendered in 1978 by Justice Lewis F. Powell Jr. in the *Bakke* affirmative-action case—that a particular skin color or surname marks its bearer as a carrier of a particular culture, justifying that individual's

admission to a university not on racially reparative or remedial grounds but in order to "diversify" everyone's educational and cultural experience.

That only puts persons and groups back in their ethno-racial "places," with labels on their faces. Against this misstep, Chief Justice John Roberts wielded the new conservative pretensions to colorblindness in a 2007 Seattle school district case, writing that "the way to stop discrimination by race is to stop discriminating by race." But Roberts's quasi-Cartesian rejection of the supposed *racial* privilege in affirmative-action programs only strengthened *class* privilege for students who were well-funded and well-prepared. Such "colorblindness," indifferent to context, reinforces racial inequities more than it mitigates them. Today, operating under the twin rubrics of "meritocracy" and "diversity," elite universities have become career-networking centers and cultural galleria for a more "colorful" elite managerial class.

Those grim, continuing inequities were anticipated well enough by Justice Harry A. Blackmun in the same *Bakke* case in which Justice Powell had introduced the "diversity" rationale for affirmative action. Blackmun offered a different rationale for a racially reparative, remedial policy: "In order to get beyond racism, we must first take account of race. There is no other way. And in order to treat some persons equally, we must treat them differently." In *Liberal Racism*, I credited Blackmun's opinion but suggested that he might better have written "sometimes" or "temporarily" instead of urging us to "first" take account of race. If we really do want to "get beyond racism," let's not put racial remedies into a cultural harness, as do "diversity" protocols and even some racially remedial initiatives—for example, racial election districting and blocking transracial adoptions (supposedly to ensure each infant a "culturally consistent" environment).

Randall Kennedy's forthcoming book *Say It Loud!: On Race, Law, History, and Culture* warns similarly that diversity's racially coded, "looks like America" façade only "normalizes practices that inevitably subordinate claims of individual merit to claims of racial group pluralism." We'll never get beyond racism if we keep indulging the presumption that people of a particular color think alike, along color-coded lines. Instead, we need to envision racial differences receding in importance until they signify little more than differences in white people's hair and eye colors, which no longer support assumptions about their bearers' abilities or beliefs, let alone their moral worth.

Unfortunately, clinging to color and racial physiognomy is still so overdetermined a response to inequality in our economically unjust society that a post-racial America seems impossible even to many of us who wish for it. We tend to excuse ethno-racial flag-wavers and censorious monitors of other people's presumed racism as the canaries in a coal mine, merely registering tremors of a civic implosion they didn't cause. Unlike the tweeting of canaries, however, the demands of the flag-wavers and the monitors must be assessed and judged, lest they distort transracial narratives of common belonging and obligation that serve a larger public good. Public adhesives must be strong enough to offset racial and sexual identities that proclaim "I am excluded, therefore I am" and that diminish individuals' chances of "finding themselves" in serving a larger common good. Writing in *Dissent*, the novelist and editor Brian Morton rightly faults ethno-racial monitors who admonish people from "other" (usually white) backgrounds to "stay in your lane" instead of appropriating other communities' cultural resources. Staying in one's lane in deference to cancel culture only makes American pluralism more brittle. It induces many whites to expect Blacks to enter the public sphere making either vengeful accusations and extortionate demands that racism supposedly justifies or, more constructively, offering the searing moral force and democratic vision of a W.E.B. Du Bois, Frederick Douglass, or Martin Luther King Jr.

Of white people's high and low expectations, Black people have borne more than enough. The L.A. Clippers coach Doc Rivers sounded almost plaintive about it as he tearfully recounted watching last year's Republican National Convention: "All you hear is Donald Trump and all of them talking about fear.... [But] we're the ones getting killed.... It's amazing why we keep loving this country, and this country does not love us back. It's really so sad.... If you watch that video [of George Floyd's killing], you don't need to be Black to be outraged. You need to be American and outraged."

The struggle for acknowledgment of Black Americans' full belonging is one of the most powerful epics of unrequited love in the history of the world. Even if every broken heart could be mended and every theft of opportunity redressed, ethno-racial communities would and should continue to honor the endurance, resilience, and resistance that have sustained their members under conditions that even the worst-off whites can barely imagine. Ultimately, though, Santayana, King, and Owens were right: if the United States is to survive as a liberal-democratic republic, it will have to transcend racialism in its shared public life.

To see more Black Americans running military machines, multinational corporations, media organizations, money markets, and governments will be to see the angels of Blackness withdraw along with the demons. White Americans will have to give up both penitential, racialist condescension and racist contempt and hypocrisy. And we will all have to acknowledge that this country's redemption won't come through making ethno-racial identity anything more than a temporary expedient on the way to a post-racial political and civic life. Global economic and demographic riptides are carrying us—especially millions of young biracial Americans—irreversibly beyond whiteness or Blackness as vessels of hope. We're not beyond them yet, but there's no turning back.

JIM SLEEPER, *a writer on American civic culture and a former columnist for the* New York Daily News, *taught political science at Yale from 1999 to 2021.*

First Contact

Santiago Ramos

What would we have to fear—or learn—from an encounter with extraterrestrials?

Three years ago, the Pentagon released a pair of videos featuring diamond- and pill-shaped "unidentified flying objects." In these videos one can hear the astonished voices of military pilots. The darting, shifting movements of these objects, the voices say, defy the laws of physics. The government has since released more videos featuring similar phenomena. Last May, former Sen. Harry Reid, a longtime advocate for government UFO disclosures, took to the *New York Times* to outline all the possible explanations: "It's unclear whether the U.F.O.s we have encountered could have been built by foreign adversaries, whether our pilots' visual perception during some encounters was somehow distorted, or whether we truly have credible evidence of extraterrestrial visitations."

Of course, visual distortion doesn't quite jolt the imagination the way space aliens and mysterious foreign-built technology do. Little wonder, then, that most of the public attention has focused on one of these two possibilities. "Regardless of whether these are super advanced military drones or alien probes it

A still from a 2015 video provided by the Department of Defense shows an unexplained object as it soars along the clouds.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE VIA AP

should be good news," tweeted Caleb Watney of the Progressive Policy Institute in 2019. The speculation did not end with the release of a new government study conducted by the director of national intelligence, the secretary of defense, and other government agencies. On June 25, having concluded an official investigation of 144 such videos, the U.S. government formally admitted they could not explain the "UAPs" in 143 of them. ("UAP" stands for "unidentified aerial phenomena," the new term for UFOs.) So: nothing debunked and nothing proved. Or as *Politico* summarized the report's findings: "The Pentagon…found no evidence to indicate that they mark a technological breakthrough by a foreign power, or that the objects are of an extraterrestrial origin—though neither explanation has been ruled out in what has been described as a preliminary assessment that lacks sufficient data."

There's more than sensationalism behind this way of framing the question. If either aliens or super-advanced foreign tech did turn out to be real, the world as we know it would change dramatically. The new government study has made it more respectable to speculate not only about whether technologically advanced alien civilizations may exist, but also about whether *human* technology might, in some secret precincts, have progressed into realms now considered impossible by physicists. This second scenario is no less fantastic than the first. It would mean that real human technological progress could match or exceed our wildest sci-fi dreams. In the Twitter thread mentioned above, Watney exclaims, "If [UFOs are] advanced military, we can apparently end the great stagnation!" "The great stagnation" is a term coined by the economist Tyler Cowen and popularized by tech entrepreneurs like Peter Thiel to describe what they see as the relative deceleration of technological progress in the past few decades. The existence of man-made UFOs might mean that this relatively un-creative period has already ended without our knowing it—until now.

In the American public imagination, flying saucers are both the ultimate symbol of the alien—of everything unfamiliar and inaccessible—and also a reassuring symbol of human possibility—a portent of our possible intergalactic destiny. The *New York Times* columnist Ross Douthat has argued that public interest in UFOs is an example of confused religious fervor, but it also seems to be an outgrowth of an old-fashioned non-religious faith: faith in Progress with a capital P. The idea that these aerial vessels could come either from another planet *or* from a secret project of a foreign power assumes that, either way, scientific progress anywhere in the universe would follow roughly the same trajectory, and that any such unexplainable marvel must ultimately be the result of science. That is, it must be something natural, not supernatural. Whatever those pilots saw, it can't have been a miracle.

First contact with an advanced alien civilization can be seen as a kind of cosmic rite of passage, the definitive sign that, scientifically at least, the human race has come of age. This is the backstory of one of American culture's most popular myths: the Star Trek universe. In *Star Trek: First Contact* (1998), once human beings develop faster-than-light travel (thanks to Zefram Cochrane, a genius working in isolation), the nearby Vulcan civilization decides to pay us a visit, and ultimately incorporates the Earth in the United Federation of Planets. Similarly, the mathematician and cultural commentator Eric Weinstein has speculated that aliens may have decided to pay us a visit after we discovered nuclear fission and fusion: "I think we sent a signal to the cosmos in 1945 and then on Nov. 1, 1952."

In the American public imagination, flying saucers are both the ultimate symbol of the alien and also a reassuring symbol of human possibility.

Three hundred years ago, major European thinkers were already considering the possibility of extraterrestrial life. "I would indeed bet all that I own—if this matter could be established through some experience—that there are inhabitants on the planets that we see," wrote Immanuel Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, in a section dealing with the concept of faith. "This view," he continues, "is not a mere opinion but a strong faith."

Three decades before Kant's *Critique*, Voltaire linked alien visitors with the modern idea of progress in a short story titled "Micromegas." This satirical work has been called the first true example of science fiction. The eponymous hero of Voltaire's story lives on a planet 21,600,000 times wider than the Earth; it orbits the nearby star Sirius. Micromegas himself is 120,000 feet tall, and towers over human beings not only physically, but also intellectually and morally. The story also features a "Saturnian" who is a mere six thousand feet tall and has only *seventy-two* different senses—Micromegas's has a thousand. Micromegas magnanimously befriends the Saturnian, allowing that "a thinking being is not necessarily ridiculous just because he is only six thousand feet tall." Together they travel to a curious little planet called Earth. Whether the earthlings they encounter—tiny creatures with a mere five senses—should also be categorized as "thinking beings" remains an open question at the end of the story.

Enlightenment writers often wrote fictional or semi-fictional accounts of voyages to strange realms. The aim of such writing, according to the historian

In one vision of human progress, there is no need to build spaceships, no need to escape our finitude. Earth is enough.

Paul Hazard, "is to get oneself transported by some means or other to an imaginary land, and there to hold an inquiry into religious, political, and social conditions of the old world." Other fictional narratives took a different approach, focusing on foreign visitors arriving in Europe. Both genres are designed to lampoon the Christian culture of Europe and the vanity of the human race. Either the exotic setting (as in a voyage story like Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*) or a foreign narrator (as in Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*) provides a contrasting perspective from which to see our follies more clearly. Ultimately, these tales tried to expose the hypocrisy and shortsightedness of conventional morality, as well as the poverty and limits of human knowledge.

One of those limits, the human narrator of "Micromegas" explains, is technological. Describing Micromegas's interstellar spaceship, the narrator says: "Those that travel only by stage coach or sedan will probably be surprised to learn of the carriage of this vessel." The earthlings Micromegas meets lack the necessary scientific knowledge to design such machines. While on Earth, he and his Saturnian companion encounter a group of philosophers, each an expert in a different school of thought. Each advances a thesis; the extraterrestrials, unimpressed, make fun of them in turn. But the biggest guffaws come when they meet a follower of the medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas:

> He said that he knew the secret: that everything would be found in the *Summa* of Saint Thomas. He looked the two celestial inhabitants up and down. He argued that their people, their worlds, their suns, their stars, had all been made uniquely for mankind. At this speech, our two voyagers nearly fell over with that inextinguishable laughter.

Illustration by Henrique Alvim Corrêa, from the 1906 Belgium edition of H. G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds*, 1906

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

It is true that, as Voltaire suggests, Aquinas believed the universe was "for" human beings, but that's primarily in the sense that the universe opens itself up to the human being, so that it might be known, named, and loved. Human beings, Aquinas says, "are in some sense everything," because they can potentially know everything, and reflect the essence of everything in their minds. Note that this does not exclude the possibility that there might be other equally intelligent beings, who can also reflect the essence of everything in their minds. In fact, Aquinas also speculated about the existence of intelligent beings who were not human. He did not imagine such beings could live on other planets only because he did not believe other celestial bodies were of the same physical nature as the Earth. But given what we know today, one can assume that a man who believed in the existence of angels would have no problem entertaining the possibility of intelligent beings from other planets.

More generally, the idea that in the Middle Ages people believed the human race to have a uniquely exalted place in the universe is not quite true. The philosopher Rémi Brague has argued that, to the medieval mind, humanity's status was much more ambiguous. In *Wisdom of the World*, he writes that at certain times during the Middle Ages, the human person was seen as a relatively lowly being: "As for quantity, man is something very small compared to the world. He is not what is the greatest in the world. He is in fact only an insignificant part of it." Higher than human beings are the angels, and the astral bodies are higher still. Brague cites a text in which Maimonides discusses the folly of regretting that one is not a higher being, such as an "angel—or a star." A star, in the medieval worldview, was a perfect and eternal sphere, fixed in the heavens. According to Brague, becoming either angel or star would amount to a "promotion."

Thus, a citizen of the Middle Ages would not necessarily disagree with the narrator of "Micromegas" when he laments, "We on our little pile of mud, can only conceive of that to which we are accustomed." After all, the Scriptures say that on this planet, we see but through a glass, darkly. Therefore, there's a lot we don't know. Aliens might exist! What's doubtful is whether Micromegas is really an alien. Does he truly embody a point of view *that* foreign to human custom? In truth, he seems less a true stranger than the projection of an eighteenth-century European mind. To fantasize about *becoming a star* is, in fact, more challenging—more *alienating*—than anything

in "Micromegas." It's arguable whether Voltaire's story is even concerned with the unknown. It is mainly a didactic satire about progress. How much of the current speculation about UFOs is merely an updated version of the same kind of projection?

The *New York Times* recently published an interview with Dr. Douglas Vakoch, the founder of Messaging Extraterrestrial Intelligence (METI), an organization that supports sending signals in search of extraterrestrial civilizations. Vakoch is hopeful: "I think the benefits [of contacting extraterrestrials] are that we can gain a perspective on ourselves and see from another civilization that it is, in fact, possible to get through this technological bottleneck that we're in right now, to have a confirmation that there is a civilization out there that may be able to provide us some advice." Like Voltaire, Vakoch believes the extraterrestrial point of view would be an aid to human progress. He imagines intelligent extraterrestrials as more advanced and, possibly, more benevolent than ourselves. "I mean, as I look into humanity's future, I do not see any assurance that we're going to make this on our own. And so getting some input, learning from the lessons from other civilizations in itself could be much more advantageous than any of the risks."

But such speculations depend on one big assumption: that we could communicate with aliens, that our minds have enough in common with theirs to be mutually intelligible. Not everyone accepts this assumption. The writer Noah Millman has argued that "nothing about [intelligent extraterrestrial life] will be organized around our social and mental categories." More to the point, the "inner" life—the first-person point of view—of highly-developed species in our own planet, like dolphins, bats, or octopuses, is mostly incomprehensible to human beings. An alien's consciousness might be more incomprehensible still.

Even if we could not easily communicate with aliens who traveled to earth, much less learn from them about the direction of our own progress, we could safely assume that any being capable of interstellar travel has some kind of rationality. At the very least we might learn something new about the scope of reason from them. Both Pope Francis and Brother Guy Consolmagno, the Vatican astronomer, have said they would baptize an alien if it asked for baptism. That, of course, would require that the alien be both rational and intelligible to us—capable of formulating a theological question, assessing an answer, and making the act of faith which, according to the Church, is an act of *reasonable* trust in God. What are the chances?

If aliens were to arrive on Earth tomorrow—aliens not only intelligent but intelligible—the first question we might want to ask them is: "What motivates you to travel through space?" Despite the pronouncements of certain adventurous billionaires, it isn't at all obvious that this is the course our own progress will take. Instead of wandering through the universe, we might burrow deeper into ourselves. In an essay titled, "Progress and Prejudice," the critic George Scialabba contrasts two views of human progress. One he labels "matter into mind," attributing the idea to figures like Arthur C. Clarke and Teilhard de Chardin. In this vision, "mind gradually, inexorably rationalizes not only our material and social relations, but eventually even our organismic form.… We become gods." The other view of progress is "a vision of human perfection achieved by going not onward and upward but inward and downward." This view, which Scialabba attributes to figures like D. H. Lawrence and Christopher Lasch, disdains technological progress and the modern, bureaucratic state. It celebrates the body, the sun, the earth. In the human future as these figures imagine it, there is no need to build spaceships, no need to escape our finitude. Earth is enough. But if alien visitors were to arrive tomorrow, one of the few things we would know for certain about them is that they were explorers, their progress directed *outwards*. The question would be why. Curiosity? Restlessness? A thirst for conquest?

Finally, try to imagine what they would make of us as we are in the early twenty-first century. In the wealthier part of the world at least, where technology is more deeply integrated into commercial life, we are creatures of rich simulated worlds, of ever-more regimented work environments, of personality tests and productivity metrics, of status updates and endless scrolling, of cropped self-images for sale. Some of us have spent the past year seriously entertaining the notion that Zoom could permanently replace the classroom. Imagine an alien, weary from many light-years of travel, encountering us as we nod before one of our many screens, our own technological progress allowing us to travel *less*, or not at all. What would such an alien make of an intelligent creature whose most conspicuous progress consists not in Promethean exploration, nor in Laurentian intimacy with the body and the earth, but in ever-sharper simulations of all these things? Perhaps the one thing that would help us to snap out of this sorry state of affairs is an encounter with something genuinely alien.

SANTIAGO RAMOS *is a contributing writer for* Commonweal. *He teaches philosophy at Rockhurst University.*

‘Sops to Humanity’

Phil Klay

How a focus on war crimes has distracted us from the evil of war itself

In 2016, on the eve of a historic peace treaty between Communist guerrillas and the Colombian government, I interviewed a retired Colombian colonel about the role of the United States in his country’s decades-long conflict. A graduate of the United States School of the Americas in the 1980s, where Vietnam veterans had taught him savage tactics like “*zonas de aniquilación*,” he was gregarious and charming, if at times a little chilling in his frank discussion of atrocities over the past decades. It had been a brutal war, fought brutally with brutal allies. “We’ll never have paradise,” he told me. “The conquistadores were criminals, bandits, terrorists of Spain, and they are my grandparents, my ancestors. I have that gene in my blood, of wickedness and evil.” And yet when I asked him what sort of military support the United States should continue to offer Colombia, he told me (after a long oration on the importance of our support to Colombian air capabilities) that we should continue helping them with “human rights, that’s important.”

At first I thought he was joking, or pandering to a soft-hearted American. The push to improve the Colombian military’s human-rights record was not considered one of our greatest successes, nor was it especially popular within parts of the Colombian military. “The army of speaking English, of protocols, of human rights is over,” a Colombian

MARCUS YAM/LOS ANGELES TIMES/GETTY

People gather around a vehicle targeted and hit by an American drone strike, which killed ten people including children, in Kabul, Afghanistan, August 30, 2021.

general would soon be recorded saying. But my Colombian colonel approached the matter of human rights the same way he approached the issue of partnering with wildly abusive paramilitary groups: pragmatically. "If the peace treaty goes through, we will be responsible for territory where we have committed massacres," he explained, "and if we continue to do that, over time, it will be bad for us."

But he might have had another reason to bring up human rights. At the time, the hardline former president was waging a bitterly divisive political campaign against the peace treaty, and "human rights" was one of his talking points. After the head of Human Rights Watch's Americas Watch division, José Miguel Vivanco, strongly criticized the "justice" provisions of the accord (he claimed they would give perpetrators of human-rights violations immunity), right-wing political figures suddenly discovered a commitment to international humanitarian law. In other words, at that moment "human rights" were a major arrow in the quiver of those opposing a peace treaty. No justice, no peace—literally.

Such perverse employment of humanitarian discourse lies at the heart of Samuel Moyn's *Humane: How the United States Abandoned Peace and Reinvented War*, which traces the rise and fall of antiwar movements over the past few centuries alongside legal battles to bind soldiers to humane conduct in war. A fascinating and disturbing book as well as a timely and vital one, *Humane* gives us a genealogy of our modern illusions about war, and builds a moral case against the style of war-making that America has favored in the twenty-first century.

Moyn begins by carefully disentangling two approaches to the horrors of war. On the one side are those whose primary goal is an end to all war. According to this school of thought, it is fine to publicize atrocities during wars, from My Lai to Abu Ghraib, but the central crime is war itself. Here the seminal figure for Moyn is the novelist Leo Tolstoy, for whom niceties like taking prisoners instead of wholesale slaughter merely put a thin veneer on barbarism. Writing *War and Peace* around the time of the First Geneva Convention (1864), which codified standards of treatment for injured soldiers, Tolstoy mocked such humanitarian ideas. "They talk to us of the rules of war," Prince Andrei says in one of several sharp commentaries on standards of military conduct in the book, "of mercy to the unfortunate and so on. It's all rubbish." Later in life Tolstoy would compare attempts to humanize war to nineteenth-century efforts to make slavery more politically acceptable by introducing limits on how badly you could treat the enslaved. (The 1826 Slave Code was one such attempt at "amelioration.") Just as humane slavery had been a sham, Tolstoy thought, so too was humane war. "Where violence is legalized," he argued, "there slavery exists."

On the other side are the humanitarians. They might share the antiwar folks' repugnance to war, but their emphasis is on the pragmatic alleviation of suffering in a world where war is a reality. To that end, they work to improve the treatment of civilians and prisoners, publicize war crimes, and constrain militaries in how they use violence. Here the seminal figure is Henri Dunant, the founder of the International Committee of the Red Cross. When Dunant saw the aftermath of the Battle of Solferino in June 1859, he ended up tending to the wounded, later writing a pamphlet about the carnage itself but also, crucially, about the badly organized medical care. The stricken fighters healed in unsanitary conditions, "their faces black with flies that buzzed around their wounds." Dunant's solution was to form international brigades to help soldiers, an idea which came to fruition in the Red Cross. Far from an antiwar organization, the Red Cross brought militaries on board its humanitarian project from the beginning.

Though the supposedly glorious tale of increasingly humane war—from the Lieber Code and the First Geneva Convention to the current emphasis on war crimes—is today the more familiar story, Moyn deftly describes the vitality of the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-centu-

ry antiwar movements, along with their practical achievements. In the 1840s William Jay, the son of Founding Father John Jay, suggested an international system in which nonpartisan outsiders would adjudicate differences between countries. Such a system would federalize the world, doing "for fractious nations what the Constitution had done for their previously fractious states in 1787." It was no pipe dream. The peace movement boasted more than one hundred fifty actual instances of arbitration between states in the late nineteenth century. Peace activists like Austrian noblewoman Bertha von Suttner, author of the influential antiwar novel *Lay Down Your Arms!*, became global celebrities, inspiring local activists and international peace conferences. At the highest reaches of government, William Jennings Bryan, Woodrow Wilson's secretary of state from 1913 to 1915, would furiously try to put the peace program into practice, concluding thirty arbitration treaties between the United States and other nations. And though the antiwar movement would fail to prevent World War I, the horror of that war won even more converts to the cause, convincing activists around the world that war itself is the greatest crime, no matter how humanely it is conducted. The League of Nations Covenant in 1919 demanded "the acceptance of obligations not to resort to war," and the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928, sponsored by the United States and France, declared that the contracting parties "condemn recourse to war for the solution of international controversies."

HUMANE
How the United States Abandoned Peace and Reinvented War

SAMUEL MOYN
Farrar, Straus and Giroux
$30 | 416 pp.

Moyn notes the inevitable failure of such efforts, but he saves his deepest cynicism for advances in humanitarian law. He describes Lieber's Code, the rules of warfare promulgated during the American Civil War and a foundational text in international humanitarian law, as an attempt to intensify war rather than restrain it. "For Leiber," Moyn writes, "anything necessary in war, more or less, ought to be legal." Of the First Geneva Convention, Moyn writes that it "mattered mainly because it cloaked the agenda of states as they followed up its 1864 convention with new moves to codify rules of war without any intended or express humanitarian goal at all." Moyn treats the reader to a lot of amusing quotes deriding these humanitarian efforts. At the Hague Convention of 1899, the first of a series of peace conferences that followed the Lieber Code in codifying laws of war, the very Britishly named First Sea Lord John Arbuthnot Fisher declared "The humanizing of War! You might as well talk about humanizing Hell!" The peace activist Suttner dismissed talk of humanizing war as a "trap that opens up in front of the feet of the pacifists."

Humane also makes much of the enormous exceptions for brutality carved out from these early codes, especially when it came to nonwhite people. Fyodor Fyodorovich Martens, who drafted a key clause in the Hague Conventions, nevertheless declared that "Muslim peoples and pagan and savage tribes" were not covered by international law. In Africa, Red Cross cofounder Gustave Moynier championed brutal Belgian imperialism in the Congo as a means of exporting Christianity and European civilization. In America, the supposed savagery of American Indians was justification for indiscriminate butchery. In Asia, U.S. generals declared that "human life all over the East is cheap" and behaved accordingly. "I want no prisoners," ordered Gen. Jacob Smith during the Philippine-American War, "I wish you to kill and burn, the more you kill and burn the better it will please me." Some estimates put the death toll of that war at a seventh of the population. Even in Europe, the tactics in the Franco-Prussian War made a mockery of the notion of humane war.

It is with some justice, then, that Moyn declares the cause of humane war to have been a failure at the beginning of the twentieth century: "The few provisions that might have imposed serious limits on the conduct of fighting were simply ignored in practice." Or, as H. G. Wells put it more savagely in 1919, "all Geneva Conventions and such palliative ordinances, though excellent in intention and good in their immediate effects make ultimately for the persistence of war as an institution. They are sops to humanity, devices for rending war barely tolerable to civilized mankind, and so staving off the inevitable rebellion against its abominations."

Following World War I, the rise of aerial warfare opened a new chapter in violence against civilian populations. Though the bombing of German and Japanese cities is well known, Moyn takes care to note that it is the Korean War that was the most brutal war of the twentieth century, as measured by per capita death. The air force reduced North Korean towns and villages to smoking ruins, then strafed survivors trying to put out the fires. At the end of three years, 4 million people had died, half of them civilians.

Given this catalogue of atrocities, it's hard to call Moyn's pervasive cynicism about the laws of war unearned, but he sometimes goes too far in his effort to dethrone more optimistic accounts of the early evolution of the laws of war. Humanizing war may indeed be like humanizing hell, but there are

Bertha von Suttner

different levels of hell, after all. The 450 cases of sexual assault prosecuted during the Civil War under the Lieber code, which explicitly forbade rape during wartime, might have represented only a tiny fraction of the sexual assaults committed during the war, but nevertheless, as Crystal N. Feimster has noted, Lieber's Code brought Black women under the umbrella of legal protection and "made it possible for women to seek justice in military courts and eventually established the modern understanding of rape as a war crime." This might not be much; it's also not nothing.

It is with the Vietnam War, though, that Moyn's story starts to shift. Within the legal world, initial opposition to the war focused on the legality of the war itself. These efforts were mostly fruitless, but as the war dragged on and the public turned against it, a new tactic for opposing the war opened up, spurred by the revelations of the massacre at My Lai, where a company of American soldiers murdered several hundred unarmed Vietnamese villagers.

"The timing of atrocity consciousness is everything," writes Moyn, and though the massacre at My Lai was hardly the worst atrocity in American military history, the public reaction was convulsive. Opprobrium at war crimes spiked in the winter of 1970–71. The Winter Soldier investigation, a mock trial in which members of Vietnam Veterans Against the War described their own transgressions, added fuel to the fire. Soon major figures like Telford Taylor, who had served as Counsel for the Prosecution at the Nuremberg Trials, were going on *The Dick Cavett Show* and claiming that the commander of troops in Vietnam was liable for war crimes—and that the president might be too.

This cultural change picked up momentum in the years following the Vietnam War. At the Red Cross, Swiss lawyer Jean Pictet rebranded the regulation of wars as "international humanitarian law" and agitated for limiting principles on collateral damage. Military lawyers, stung not only by defeat but by the highly publicized accusations of atrocity in Vietnam, began focusing on military conduct in war. And new monitoring groups such as Human Rights Watch sprang up to denounce governments that committed wartime atrocities while remaining neutral about the justice of the wars themselves.

By the Gulf War in 1990, Human Rights Watch was on the ground monitoring its first international conflict, while U.S. military lawyers inserted themselves for the first time in the process of picking targets in accordance with the rules of war. Gen. Colin Powell commended lawyers as "absolutely indispensable to military operations," and the deployment of America's "smart bombs" was, as Moyn ironically puts it, "leading the military from a depressing nadir of grotesque horror to the sunlit uplands of humane war." Or, as George H. W. Bush earnestly put it, "the specter of Vietnam has been buried forever in the desert sands."

Then came 9/11, and the Bush administration's flouting of humanitarian codes. For Moyn, this is the exception that proved the rule. When President George W. Bush's administration declared prisoners of war captured in Afghanistan to be outside normal rules of treatment for prisoners and began permitting the use of torture, it did spark an increasingly powerful response from activists, a few administration insiders, and the military itself. But according to Moyn, "consciousness of war crimes did not end a war but helped reset one," ultimately making the war more durable.

Here Moyn's narrative becomes more of an insider legal history, detailing how the brutal conduct of the Bush administration was slowly reined in (while leaving untouched the expansion of presidential authority for war-making). For Moyn, this is not the triumphal story of America regaining its moral purity; it's a story that confirms the early warnings from Tolstoy and peace activists like Suttner. Take John Yoo, author of the infamous torture memos, which permitted "enhanced interrogation techniques" like waterboarding on detainees. As Moyn points out, Yoo's legal arguments didn't just exempt America from standard rules of conduct in war; they also asserted almost limitless presidential authority in war-making. And although "much greater suffering was visited on more people through illegal war than illegal war crimes—in part because so much is legal once war starts," it was only Yoo's torture memos that became infamous.

From this perspective, the election of Barack Obama proved to be a victory for humane war but a disaster for the war against war itself. While liberal journalists like the *New Yorker*'s Jane Mayer were writing that "Obama consigned to history the worst excesses of the Bush administration's war on terror," his administration was steadily advocating an expansive view of the executive's powers in waging war, with Elena Kagan suggesting a "global battlefield" concept of the war on

Moyn's ultimate purpose is not simply to offer a genealogy, but also to invite his American readers to consider Tolstoy's warning that "where violence is legalized, there slavery exists."

terror, in which anyone could be captured anywhere without constraint. Moyn carefully makes his way through the various legal arguments of these early days to show how quickly the Obama administration began laying out the rationales for our current war paradigm, which he calls "a spree of humane killing on which the sun might never set in space or end in time."

Famously, Obama turned to drones to carry out counterterrorism missions, striking almost ten times as many targets as his predecessor. What before 9/11 might have counted as assassination was recast as simple self-defense, even when Obama's lawyers had to use absurd terms like "elongated imminence" to justify strikes against targets who didn't actually pose an immediate threat. As new terrorist groups proliferated, the Obama administration stretched the Authorization for the Use of Military Force passed after 9/11 to permit strikes against groups with few or no ties to Al Qaeda, including groups that had never struck at the United States. And though the War Powers Resolution required congressional signoff after sixty days of "hostilities," Obama lawyers argued that "hostilities" was "an ambiguous term of art" that need not include bombing. Concerns about the president's expanding authority to kill were waved away by administration officials who pointed to the supposed rigor with which the laws of war were being applied. "There hasn't been a single collateral death because of the exceptional proficiency and precision of the capabilities we've been able to develop," claimed then-Homeland Security Advisor John Brennan in one of the more outrageous falsehoods of the past twenty years. As the lawyer Naz Modirzadeh complained, the optics of precise, humane targeting were "being used to give an international law-like gloss" to "a policy they anticipated would be criticized for being unlawful."

American war was thus expanded in scope while constrained in its conduct, a situation that lasted through the Trump years. Despite Trump's interest in reviving torture, for example, the national-security establishment pushed back, preferring to keep its wars—by then waged in nineteen countries, over the course of forty-one operations, with no end in sight—respectable.

The history Moyn lays out is compelling, if at times a bit confusing. The early chapters of *Humane* constantly jump back and forth in time, referencing a bewildering number of lawyers and activists and politicians. Moyn's ultimate purpose, however, is not simply to offer a genealogy, but also to invite his American readers to consider Tolstoy's warning that "where violence is legalized, there slavery exists."

We currently claim the right to exercise violence in broad swathes of the world. We have extremely limited contact with, or understanding of, the societies where that violence is happening. War waged like this is not politics by other means, but something more disturbingly akin to pest control—an endless series of deaths meted out to the members of those societies we find most troubling (which under the last administration could mean anyone carrying a two-way radio or wearing a tactical vest). When the anthropologist Hugh Gusterson did fieldwork in Waziristan, a poor region of Pakistan where drones have been deployed for more than a decade, he found people trapped in the "living death" of "fear as a way of life," in which above every moment hangs the possibility of a drone strike or special-operations raid. "A global policing system burnished with your humane aspirations but under your nation's sole authority," Moyn argues, might amount to "a humbling new form of permanent subjugation for others." Even if we could bomb with the perfect precision claimed by the early Obama administration, there's something morally troubling about that.

But, of course, we don't bomb with perfect precision. After the suicide attack during our evacuation from Afghanistan that killed thirteen servicemembers and 170 Afghan civilians at Kabul's airport, the Biden administration trumpeted a retaliatory strike against the alleged planner of the attack, as well as a strike against an ISIS Khorasan car bomber. The latter strike, which the general who heads Central Command bragged was "very disruptive to [ISIS's] attack plans," actually killed ten civilians, seven of them children.

Details soon emerged in national newspapers about the victims: the worker at an American aid group; his children, killed in his car next to him; the former army officer, who had hopes of getting a special immigrant visa to America; his fiancée. But this was, after all, only one of an endless series of strikes we've carried out over the years, most of which have received little public attention. Now, with no more U.S. troops in Afghanistan, we can expect attention to the suffering in Afghanistan to again recede from the news. What won't recede is our lethal presence in the skies above that country.

"We will maintain the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan and other countries," President Biden promised in the same speech in which he also claimed to have ended twenty years of war. "We just don't need to fight a ground war to do it. We have what's called over-the-horizon capabilities, which means we can strike terrorists and targets without American boots on the ground—or very few, if needed." It might strike you as chilling to have a president claim to have ended a war in one breath, and, in the next, promise that the killing will continue. But never fear. Biden also made sure to deliver a few words that would have warmed the heart of my Colombian colonel. "Human rights," he said, "will be the center of our foreign policy."

PHIL KLAY *is the author of the novel* Missionaries *and the short-story collection* Redeployment. *He teaches at Fairfield University's MFA program.*

THE NEW WORLD

Anthony Carelli

It's true: Pilgrim, for you it may be that nothing happens
anymore. That life is this going on all around

you all the time and nothing else. That this land
is blank land. This land is blank land, from California

to the unnamed island. That from an Apollo stair-
case you may leap each morning a moonwalker

to discover the plains of Kansas at last devoid
of evil men. That hallelujah now the cavalry

will ride at your command, crusading backward
through memory, their sword blades trued with

all we know now but couldn't know then. That
your warhorse's hammering head hits the source.

That who, you rightly ask, who are the savages now.
And true it may be that the whole of your light

shines forth in this darkening sky, the heaven
between the dot that ends this sentence and

the great cross heralding the next. That the in-
finitesimal is your new glory—and that indeed

there is glory in a certain kind of small. That in
the long night within your bones there hangs

the shard of a crescent moon. That we awaken—
who?—every morning in a tome of tomes of tomes.

That the great star's immense burning, so faintly
printed on a noontime flag, reminds us all that

it is so. That grace awaits you nonetheless,
Pilgrim. That in this in-between breath, you may

find your rightful home, in these stories that no one
remembers that—without you—no one knows.

ANTHONY CARELLI *hails from Poynette, Wisconsin, and now lives in Brooklyn, New York. Recipient of a Whiting Writers Award, his second collection of poems,* The New World: Infinitesimal Epics, *has just been published by Princeton University Press.*

The Other Afghanistan

Images from beyond the battlefield

SOLMAZ DARYANI

Since the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan twenty years ago, most of the Western discussion about the country has had to do with terrorism, security, and governance. Understandably, perhaps, much less attention has been given to the most pressing material needs of ordinary Afghans, especially food security, which is now being threatened as never before by climate change.

According to the United Nations Environment Programme, Afghanistan is one of the countries most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change—and, in particular, to droughts and floods. Very little of the $2 trillion spent by the United States in Afghanistan since 2001 has been used to help the country's mostly rural population adapt to the changing conditions that affect their livelihood. In 2018, a drought forced 295,000 Afghans to abandon their homes in search of food and water. Families who could no longer support themselves on the land fled to camps of internally displaced people near big cities. Many of these families have pulled their daughters out of school and married them off in return for a "bride price." The education of girls is imperiled not only by the Taliban but also by extreme poverty.

The following photos were taken in Bamyan Province in 2019, while the war was still raging. Now that the Taliban have regained control of Afghanistan and the United States and its allies have left, it remains to be seen how much foreign aid will reach the Afghans who need it most on land scarred by forty years of war and now threatened by global changes beyond their control.

SOLMAZ DARYANI *is an Iranian documentary photographer based in Iran and the United Kingdom. She is a grantee of the Magnum Foundation, National Geographic Society, and a member of Women Photograph and Diversify Photo.*

Two boys bicycle past a burned-out Soviet tank on the side of a road in central Bamyan. Afghanistan has been at war for most of the past four decades.

ABOVE: Two brothers in Paymouri village try to save their muddy potato and wheat fields after a flash flood damaged crops and washed away animals. Climate change is expected to make floods and droughts much more frequent in the coming decades.

TOP RIGHT: A young boy rides a donkey carrying plastic drums of drinking water from a public water pipe thirty minutes away from his home. Because many Afghan houses have no running water, children are often sent for water several times a day. While the United States spent $2.26 trillion in Afghanistan during the war, less than $144 billion was spent on reconstruction.

BOTTOM RIGHT: Zahra Ebad carries vegetables home with the help of her daughters. "We have a small wheat field in Surkh Darra village, but due to last year's water crisis caused by drought, we couldn't water the area, and our wheat fields dried out in the heat. My husband had to borrow money from a sibling to cultivate the field this year." Surkh Darra is one of the regions hit hardest by drought, and many local families married off their underage daughters just to save them from hardship.

ABOVE: Two schoolgirls, on their way home from an English class, cover their faces as they walk through a sudden dust storm in Bamyan Valley. In the background is an empty niche where one of the ancient Buddhas of Bamyan statues once stood, before they were destroyed by the Taliban in 2001. In recent years, Bamyan, located in Afghanistan's central highlands, with steep mountain slopes, deep valleys, and harsh winters, has experienced weather extremes.

RIGHT: Thirteen-year-old Gol Chaman washes vegetables in the murky water from a local canal. Chaman lives in Laghman, a village in Bamyan Province. She has to run to the canal two or three times a day after school. When the water is low, she may have to wait in line for a long time before she can do her job. She says that she is sometimes so tired afterwards that she can no longer do her homework for school.

Afghan children wait for class to start at a girl's high school in Bamyan Province. One-fifth of the students—several hundred girls—were pulled out of school by their families during the recent drought, according to the school's director, Abdul Qayoon Afshar.

MONKS

Danielle Chapman

I've met one named Phoenix Jiránek,
ringleted and effusing "contuition"
as gaily as a Franciscan in a boat
eating honeycakes with an angel.

Thus the Lord showed me both ways,
the austere and the hospitable, are good.

This morning I pray, make my food
honeycomb. Let me feed
on names caught out of solitude:
Cronius, Achilles, John the Dwarf.

Sweeten my awkwardness as I morph
into this weird, glad cloud of witnesses.

Let my shortcomings be laid
at my own door.

DANIELLE CHAPMAN *is a poet and essayist. Her collection of poems,* Delinquent Palaces, *was published by Northwestern University Press in 2015. Her poems have appeared in the* Atlantic *and the* New Yorker*, and her essays can be found in the* Oxford American *and* Poetry. *She teaches literature and creative writing at Yale.*

INTERVIEW

Arab Christians in the Holy Land

A conversation with David Neuhaus, SJ

Nicholas Frankovich

Fr. David Neuhaus, SJ, the superior of the Jesuit community in the Holy Land, has taught Scripture at Bethlehem University and at the seminary of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem. He was the vicar for Hebrew-speaking Catholics of the patriarchate from 2009 to 2017 and served as its coordinator of pastoral care for migrants and asylum seekers. He earned his bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in political science from Hebrew University, his licentiate in theology from Centre Sèvres in Paris, and his licentiate in sacred Scripture from the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome. The author of more than a dozen books and countless articles, Neuhaus is a frequent commentator on social and political issues facing present-day Israelis and Palestinians. His most recent book, in Arabic, is Judaism Evolved Among Us: An Introduction to Judaism for Christian Arabs *(2019). He is currently involved in the formation of young Jesuits throughout the Middle East. His varied background gives him a wide perspective and unique insight into the problems afflicting Israel and the Palestinian territories. Nicholas Frankovich interviewed him by email; this interview has been edited for length and clarity.*

NICHOLAS FRANKOVICH: You're a Catholic priest in Jerusalem and serve as the Jesuit superior there. You're fluent in both Hebrew and Arabic. And in the eyes of the Israeli government, you're a Jewish Israeli. Please describe your background in more detail, if you would. How does it affect your perspective on the religious and political conflicts and tensions in the region?

DAVID NEUHAUS: I was born into a German Jewish family that found refuge in South Africa during the 1930s. The family was dispersed around the globe, and all those who did not leave Germany were exterminated by the Nazis. This is a very important part of my identity. Being born in South Africa during the horrific years of apartheid and spending the first fifteen years of my life there also marked me deeply. My family was strongly opposed to the regime and we were brought up with a strong sense of justice.

Fr. David Neuhaus, SJ, lights a baptismal candle during a Mass for Hebrew-speaking Catholics in Israel, 2014.

CNS PHOTO/COURTESY WWW.CATHOLIC.CO.IL

Attending an excellent private Jewish school, I received a fine Jewish and secular education, and learned Hebrew and love of the language and culture. Arriving in Jerusalem at the age of fifteen for the first time in 1977, I was determined to understand what was going on. My first lifelong friend there was a Muslim Palestinian Arab, and this was the incentive to learn Arabic, as his family became like an adopted family for me. In their midst, I learned not only Arabic but also Arab culture, and experienced Islam as a religious tradition within a family that was very traditional. This marked my perspective profoundly.

However, at the same young age, I was also exposed to Christianity. I met a radiant witness to Christ in the figure of an eighty-nine-year-old Russian Orthodox nun, and her witness was absolutely convincing. I promised my parents I would wait ten years before seeking baptism, and when I did, I was asked to discern for a further two years by the

Church. I was finally baptized in 1988 as a Roman Catholic, and then waited an additional three years in order to enter the Society of Jesus.

During those long years I studied at Hebrew University, completing my PhD in 1991, which focused on the Palestinian Arabs who are citizens of the state of Israel. After eight years abroad in Jesuit formation, I returned to Jerusalem to teach Scripture in Catholic and Jewish institutions in 2000, the year in which I was ordained to the priesthood.

I have been serving in Jerusalem ever since. In 2009, I was named episcopal vicar for Hebrew-speaking Catholics and migrants in Israel and served in that function until 2017. I am now superior of the Jesuits in the Holy Land, and we maintain a presence in West Jerusalem (Israel) and Bethlehem (Palestine).

NF: In the United States, when we speak of Middle Eastern Christians, we tend to overlook those in Israel-Palestine. Most are Arabs, but not all. If it's fair to generalize about them, how would you characterize their worldview and their place in Israeli and Palestinian society?

DN: The Christians in Israel-Palestine are characterized first and foremost by their place in the margins. In Israel there are four groups of Christians: Palestinian Arabs who are citizens of Israel (120,000 people); Hebrew-speaking Christians who are sociologically part of Jewish society (40,000); migrant Christians who are without permanent status (150,000); and expatriate Christians who serve the Church (1,000).

Those who are most rooted are the Palestinian Arabs who are Israeli citizens. Like all Arabs in the state of Israel, they live a reality of discrimination. Although they can vote in the elections, the discrimination they face manifests in all aspects of daily life, as Arabs are not granted the same budgets, development opportunities, and employment opportunities as Jewish citizens in Israel.

Hebrew-speaking Christians as part of Jewish society do not face the same kind of discrimination but are under strong pressure to lose their Christian identity and assimilate into the undifferentiated mass of secular Jews.

Migrant Christians, like migrants everywhere, face daily life in circumstances of poverty, exploitation, and instability. Look-

ing from the margins, most Christians realize that the society they live in must change if they are to have a secure future.

In Palestine, there are about fifty thousand Christians, who are almost all Palestinian Arabs, with a small number of expatriates working for the local Church. The biggest challenges the Christian Palestinians are dealing with are the mechanisms of the Israeli occupation that prevent freedom of movement and freedom to build up an autonomous society—a challenge to all Palestinians—and the challenge of being a tiny number in a society that is predominantly Muslim and not always sensitive to Christian sensibilities. The expatriates in both Israel and Palestine include a large number of Catholic clergy, who face the challenge of trying to help the local Christians keep Catholic life and institutions functioning in the highly volatile situation in which we live.

NF: Many American Christians tend to think of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a religious or civilizational conflict between Jews and Muslims, with Israeli Jews representing Western and Judeo-Christian values. But Christians on the ground—in Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Nazareth—tend to take the Palestinian side, especially if it's the one they were born into. As someone in a position to speak for them to their Western coreligionists, how would you explain their sympathies? Their grievances? Aspirations?

DN: First, we as Christians living at the center of this festering and untreated wound that is Israel-Palestine absolutely refuse to relate to this conflict as a religious one. It is a conflict between two national movements.

One is the Jewish national movement called Zionism. It was born out of the European experience in which Jews were often refused integration as full members of the nations that were defining themselves in the nineteenth century: Russians, Poles, Rumanians, Hungarians, Germans, French, et al. This refusal reached a peak during the Nazi genocide, a time when most Jews in the world became convinced that Zionism—the migration to Palestine and the call for a Jewish state there—was the only way out.

The other is the Palestinian Arab national movement that was born among the indigenous people of Palestine struggling against first Turkish and then British colonialism and seeking independence. The two national movements were forged within the developing conflict between them. Jews claimed they were returning to an ancient homeland (heavily relying on the Bible as justification), and Palestinians (including native Jews who were there) argued that they were the indigenous people of the land.

Christians resent the manipulation of religion in this struggle. Bringing God into the argument makes it even more intractable. Most local Christians aspire to a resolution that will bring equality for all, mutual respect, justice, and peace. Religion could be a help if it spoke prophetically, but too often it is used to radicalize already intransigent rejection of the other.

NF: In an interview in *America* in 2014, you said that "a first step" out of the impasse of conflict between Israel and Palestinians "must be the end of Israeli occupation so that Palestinians can have a living space in which they are not surrounded and controlled. However, this is not enough to really bring us out of the impasse." What do you think should be the subsequent steps?

DN: There are two issues that must be dealt with on the political front to change our reality. One is the occupation that dates back to 1967, when Israel conquered the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and the Gaza Strip. The imposition of military rule on these areas created a situation in which residents there live without the right to self-determination, and this has been only slightly changed in the important cities by the agreements signed with the Palestinians in the 1990s. The Israeli military still fully controls these territories, which are encircled, and thus prevents freedom of movement, freedom of association, freedom of development, etc.

The other issue is the lack of equality inside the state of Israel. Israel is defined as a Jewish state, but there is a 21 percent Palestinian Arab population within Israel that is living in a reality of discrimination. These two realities are the result of the wound at the heart of our reality: Jews have established a home for themselves, a wealthy, powerful, and well-functioning state, whereas Palestinians remain without a state in which they too can be secure, prosper, and define their own future. This has given rise to more and more radical ideologies of exclusivism and denial of the other, on both sides. At the present moment in our history, radical and exclusive ideologies on both sides are predominant, and voices of moderation and dialogue are pushed to the margins.

NF: Jewish settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem appear to have made the prospect of a contiguous Palestinian state infeasible. That has led to increasing talk of the need to form a multinational state encompassing present-day Israel and the territories it now occupies, with citizenship and equal civil rights for all residents regardless of race or religion. What do you think of that?

DN: The idea of one state for two peoples is not a new one. Great Jewish thinkers in the 1930s favored it, especially as they began to recognize that Palestine was not an empty land, not "a land without a people waiting for a people without a land." These thinkers included Martin Buber; Judah Magnes, founder of Hebrew University; Henrietta Szold, founder of Hadassah; and Hannah Arendt. Important Palestinian thinkers who recognize that Jews are not foreign to Palestine also adopted the idea of a "secular, democratic state," one of them being Edward Said.

In fact, the president of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, already pointed out in 2008 that if the Israeli authorities continue to build settlements in the West Bank and prevent the development of a Palestinian state, the only alternative will be a one-state solution. Today, the population

Palestinian Christians from the Greek Orthodox Church march during the Easter Holy Fire ritual in the Old City of Jerusalem, April 14, 2012.

between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River is about 50 percent Jewish and 50 percent Palestinian Arab. A one-state solution, imposed, in my opinion, by the Israeli insistence on continuing the occupation, means that the upcoming struggle will be for a state that guarantees equality to all its citizens.

What is my preference? As a Christian, I think that one state might indeed be preferable. A democratic, secular state avoids the danger that the Jewish Israeli state be ethnocentric and discriminate against non-Jews, and that the Palestinian state be too strongly colored by its Muslim majority, insensitive to Christian sensibilities. A secular, democratic state, though, would not be easy to achieve and would probably also take years of struggle for civil rights. For many Christians today, the most important word is "equality."

NF: Do you have thoughts about Israel's nation-state law? In December, the Israeli Supreme Court heard a case against it but has yet to rule on it.

DN: The nation-state law of 2018 further cemented the issue of discrimination but was nothing new. It underlined once again that Israel is a Jewish state. Perhaps it is sufficient here to quote from the reaction of the Church authorities in Israel, with which I fully concur:

> According to this law, the State of Israel has legislated that the people whose "welfare and safety" it is most concerned to promote and protect are limited to the Jewish citizens of the State of Israel. We must draw the attention of the authorities to a simple fact: our faithful, the Christians, our fellow citizens, Muslim, Druze and Baha'i, all of us who are Arabs, are no less citizens of this country than our Jewish brothers and sisters.... Although the law changes very little in practice, it does provide a constitutional and legal basis for discrimination among Israel's citizens, clearly laying out the principles according to which Jewish citizens are to be privileged over and above other citizens.... Christians, Muslims, Druze, Baha'i and Jews demand to be treated as equal citizens. This equality must include the respectful recognition of our civic (Israeli), ethnic (Palestinian Arab) and religious (Christian) identities, as both individuals and as communities. As Israelis and as Palestinian Arabs, we seek to be part of a state that promotes justice and peace, security and prosperity for all its citizens. As Christians, we take pride that the universal Church was founded in Jerusalem and her first faithful were children of this land and its people. We recognize that Jerusalem and the whole of this Holy Land is a heritage we share with Jews and Muslims, Druze and Baha'i, a heritage we are called upon to protect from division and internecine strife.... We, as the religious leaders of the Catholic Churches, call on the authorities to rescind this Basic Law and assure one and all that the State of Israel seeks to promote and protect the welfare and the safety of all its citizens.

NF: What is the role specifically of the Catholic Church in attempting to heal the wounds that you often speak of, the wounds borne by Jews in their history as a persecuted minority, and the wounds borne by Palestinians in their statelessness and loss of a homeland?

DN: The Catholic Church has a very distinct role. She is called to preach good news, and it is good news for all. It is the good news of the Resurrection. It is the good news that out of untreated wounds can emerge new life by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Church has been promoting a vision of what the Holy Land could be for more than a hundred years, since the troubles began in the aftermath of World War I. This work of the Church must touch upon the three sources of the wound:

1. *Anti-Semitism*: It was hatred of the Jews that led so many Jews to seek refuge in a land that was perceived by

many as a spiritual home, an idea rooted in Scripture. The war against anti-Semitism is a central part in the healing of the wound. Jews need to know that Christians understand their fears and vulnerability.

2. *Bible*: For many Christians, Jewish exclusive claims to the land are justified by the biblical text. The Church must interpret the Bible according to sound principles that make it a Word of God for all. This means countering the exploitation of the Bible as a weapon of one party against the other. The word of God cannot be used to expel people from their homes, confiscate their property, and condemn them to be homeless. It cannot be exploited to justify war, revenge, and abuse.

3. *Islam*: Contempt for Muslims (and the Christians of the East) convinced many that the land was a land without a people. Just as the Church has taken huge steps forward in dialogue with Jews, so the Church proposes with Muslims today a dialogue that refuses Islamophobia and the stereotyping of Muslims and Arabs as terrorists and violent by nature. We have not progressed at all if we replace anti-Semitism with Islamophobia!

Four popes have visited Israel-Palestine since 1964. Each one has come proclaiming a message of justice and peace. In fact, these words are very important, as they provide an alternative discourse to the one of hatred that reigns in the political milieux and in the streets. Pope Francis had this to say after his visit in 2014, when he prayed alongside Israeli president Shimon Peres and Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas in the Vatican:

> Peacemaking calls for courage, much more so than warfare. It calls for the courage to say yes to encounter and no to conflict: yes to dialogue and no to violence; yes to negotiations and no to hostilities; yes to respect for agreements and no to acts of provocation; yes to sincerity and no to duplicity. All of this takes courage, it takes strength and tenacity. History teaches that our own powers do not suffice. More than once we have been on the verge of peace, but the evil one, employing a variety of means, has succeeded in blocking it. That is why we are here, because we know and we believe that we need the help of God. We do not renounce our responsibilities, but we do call upon God in an act of supreme responsibility before our consciences and before our peoples. We have heard a summons, and we must respond. It is the summons to break the spiral of hatred and violence, and to break it by one word alone: the word "brother." But to be able to utter this word we have to lift our eyes to heaven and acknowledge one another as children of one Father.

NF: You're a Scripture scholar. Do you have favorite books of the Bible? Favorite passages?

DN: Indeed, I do! The Gospel of Saint Mark. This Gospel presents in all its rawness the need of the disciple to constantly repent. The biggest opponent to Jesus's mission in Mark's writing is the disciples who have so much difficulty opening up to the horizons of Jesus's mission. They want to keep him in Capernaum in chapter one, and they want to stay among the Jews at the end of chapter four. However, Jesus stretches them, almost to the breaking point, so that they embrace all. This is our challenge as Christians: we must love Jew and Muslim, Israeli and Palestinian, and in the name of that love continue to envision how, by speaking truth, working for justice, we can propose a language broad enough to respect all and promote the well-being of all.

NF: You've spoken highly of Michel Sabbah, the former Latin patriarch of Jerusalem, describing him as saintly. Could you say a few words about him and about why you admire him?

DN: Michel Sabbah, who was Latin patriarch (Roman Catholic archbishop) from 1987 to 2008 and who ordained me as a priest, has been one of my most important teachers in this land. He is a man who has devoted his life to the Church, and has served with fidelity and courage. However, it is the way he speaks about this land that resounds with evangelical values. He sees the land for what it could be for all of us, Jews, Christians, and Muslims, Israelis and Palestinians, and he never gives up. Despite opposition from his detractors and the events that wear us all down, he continues with vigor and with confidence that God is ultimately in charge. He is now eighty-eight years old and has given up most of his activities except his leading role in our Justice and Peace Commission [of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem], where his voice is raised to promote the respect and dignity of every human being.

NF: Lasting peace in the region seems so improbable. Do you have any words to encourage those who work, pray, and hope for it?

DN: I find no better words than those I spoke for Michel Sabbah: remember, God is in control. God is good. God is love. Eventually God will vanquish the evil one. At the end of the Book of Genesis, Joseph says to his brothers, "Although you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good" (Genesis 50:20). This is a principle that is illustrated throughout sacred Scripture: God can transform human evil into good. We must continue to do what we can to change reality, and we must believe that God will change it in God's own time. One of the most important things we must do is watch our tongues. Let every word we speak be a word that promotes justice and peace, forgiveness and reconciliation. Our words create the worlds we and our children live in. Our words are words of war or of peace, of hatred or of love, of prejudice or of openness, and with the words we speak we form the reality that will materialize tomorrow.

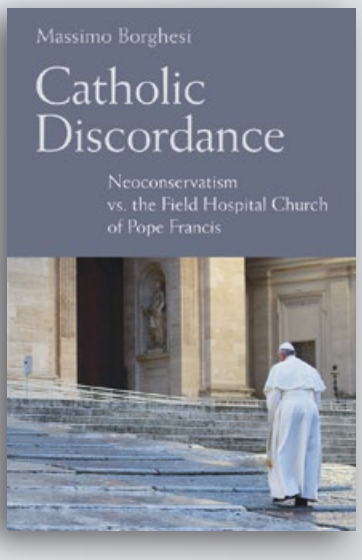
NICHOLAS FRANKOVICH, *a regular contributor to* Commonweal, *is an editor of* National Review.

New Books for Deeper Understanding and Nourishment

Catholic Discordance

Neoconservatism vs. the Field Hospital Church of Pope Francis

Massimo Borghesi; Translated by Barry M. Hudock



"Thrilling in its breadth and depth, beautifully translated, and crammed with insights, *Catholic Discordance* is the definitive analysis of the choices and tensions the church faces in a post-Christendom world."

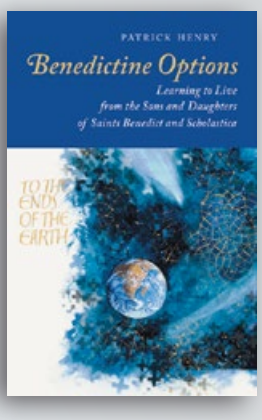
Austen Ivereigh, author of *Wounded Shepherd* and co-author of Pope Francis's *Let Us Dream*

"Expanding his earlier defense of Pope Francis from critics who consider the pope a theological and intellectual 'lightweight,' Massimo Borghesi leads us through a very readable analysis of the neo-conservative, largely American, detractors of the magisterium of Francis. He describes how Bergoglio's insistence on discernment charts an ecclesial course which rejects both extremes of fundamentalism and relativism."

Bishop John Stowe, OFM Conv, Diocese of Lexington

Hardcover with dust jacket, 280 pp., $29.95

Available November 2021



Bendictine Options

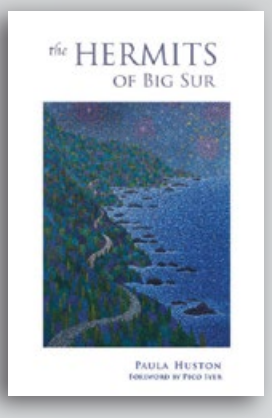
Learning to Live from the Sons and Daughters of Saints Benedict and Scholastica

Patrick Henry

"Energizing and encouraging reading. Written equally for monastic and non-monastic, we are given a survey which shows the development and expansion of Benedictine options in today's world."

Esther de Waal, author of *The Way of Simplicity*

Paperback, 176 pp., $19.95



The Hermits of Big Sur

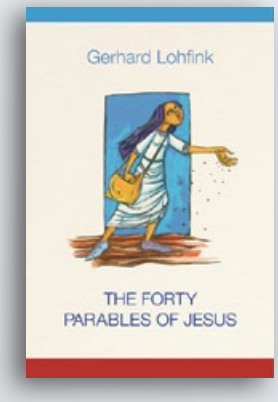
Paula Huston; Foreword by Pico Iyer

"This is a wonderfully affectionate and informative look at the holy ground that has been a source of prayer, revelation, and grace for so many."

Ron Hansen, Santa Clara University, author of *Mariette in Ecstasy* and *Hotly in Pursuit of the Real*

Paperback, 240 pp., $24.95

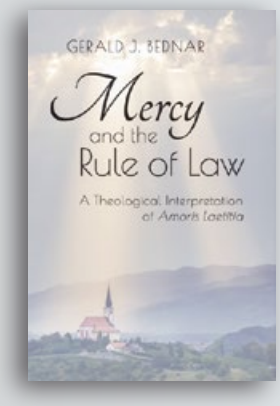
Available October 2021



The Forty Parables of Jesus

Gerard Lohfink

Hardcover with dust jacket, 272 pp., $29.95

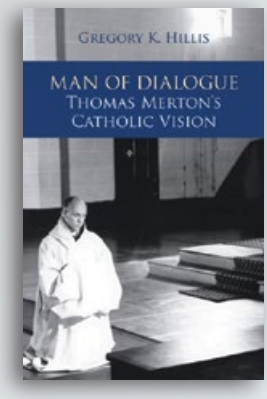


Mercy and the Rule of Law

A Theological Interpretation of *Amoris Laetitia*

Gerald Bednar

Paperback, 232 pp., $24.95



Man of Dialogue

Thomas Merton's Catholic Vision

Gregory K. Hillis

Paperback, 272 pp., $24.95

Available November 2021

CALL TO ASK ABOUT EXAM COPY POLICY

LITURGICAL PRESS litpress.org • 800-858-5450

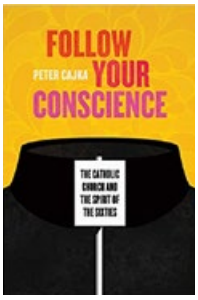
eBooks also available

Internal Affairs

BERNARD G. PRUSAK

"Conscience" has a suggestive but also enigmatic etymology. It is "knowledge with"—but with whom? One answer is simply: with ourselves. In conscience, we know inwardly, secretly, of wrongs we have done. But another answer is: with others. In conscience, knowledge that we share with others in our moral community, or perhaps with all moral agents, is brought to bear on our actions or prospective actions. A third answer is: with God. In conscience, we know God's law, or God's will for us in our circumstances, or, more ominously, God's judgment of us as sinners. As that answer hints, just what we know in conscience is open to question—a second enigma suggested by its etymology. Maybe what we know in conscience is, more modestly, how an action or prospective action of ours squares with our values. In that case, a bad conscience is merely a personal sanction, rather than a signal of divine judgment.

Whatever our theory of conscience is, it ought to strike us as a peculiar phenomenon. My conscience "speaks" only to me, about what I have done or might do, and the same is true of yours. The relationship is intimate—private, or at least personal. And yet we are passive before conscience: we undergo its judgments; we suffer its rebukes. Though "internal" to us, conscience in some sense stands over us, making us feel guilty or ashamed, or demanding our obedience. It is an interesting fact in this regard that, while as children we learn from our elders just what circumstances ought to make us feel guilty or ashamed, the responses of guilt and shame are not themselves learned; they are innate to us as human beings. Conscience seems to have deep roots in our constitution.



FOLLOW YOUR CONSCIENCE
The Catholic Church and the Spirit of the Sixties

PETER CAJKA
University of Chicago Press
$45 | 232 pp.

Peter Cajka has written a fascinating book about conscience as it was invoked, interpreted, and contested by Catholics in the United States from the 1930s into the 1970s. *Follow Your Conscience* draws attention to two surprising findings: first, it was Catholic priests who "became the nation's prime defenders" of the rights of conscience in the course of the twentieth century; second, "recurrent overlaps of sex and war" propelled conscience out of the manuals of moral theology and the confessional into public discourse. In Cajka's telling, the prominent role of priests as defenders of conscience "flips on its head the pervasive story line about priest-ridden Catholics," which endures in the aftermath of the clergy sexual-abuse scandal and coverup. Catholic priests "preached the gospel of conscience-following" and thereby helped "change the terms of American freedom." The convergence of sex and war in the rise of conscience language forms a striking pattern. Opposition to saturation bombing and condom distribution to soldiers in World War II was followed by resistance to conscription during the Vietnam War, opposition to the magisterium's teaching on contraception in *Humanae vitae*, and resistance to cooperation in the provision of abortion after *Roe v. Wade*.

Consider only the opening years of the 1970s. In a coincidence of history, *Roe v. Wade*, the termination of the draft, and what Cajka calls "the birth of the all-volunteer army" all came in the same year, 1973. Catholic resistance to conscription in the Vietnam War had failed: the Supreme Court rejected selective conscientious objection—objecting to participation in a particular war on the grounds of its injustice—in its 1971 *Gillette* and *Negre* decisions, though these decisions effectively became moot with the termination of the draft. By contrast, Catholic resistance to abortion quickly led, in 1973, to the Church Amendment, named after Sen. Frank Church, which prohibited the government from requiring individuals and hospitals to assist in the performance of abortion if doing so would violate religious beliefs or moral convictions. Sen. Church, who was both a Democrat and a practicing Catholic, also was an active opponent of the Vietnam War. Likewise in 1973, the Case-Church Amendment cut off further funding for fighting in Indochina without specific authorization from Congress. The Vietnam War was coming to an end; the culture war over abortion was just beginning.

Cajka presents Thomas Aquinas's theory of conscience at the crux of all this action. "Thomas Aquinas," he writes,

A priest in a confessional in the Barcelona Cathedral

JORDI SALAS/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

"placed a conceptual bomb in Catholic thought in the thirteenth century that went off in the second half of the twentieth century." For Aquinas, conscience is not a special faculty or power, but instead a function of practical reason. In conscience, I apply the precepts of the natural law to me in my circumstances. So-called cases of conscience are occasions when it is difficult to know how some precept applies, or whether it does at all. For example, if I am starving, is it licit for me to steal the bread I need to survive? Would taking the bread in those circumstances even be "stealing"? Aquinas says it would not be. If I can reason my way to that conclusion, I can take the bread in good conscience, so to speak.

Until the middle of the twentieth century, however, it was understood that the good Catholic wasn't supposed to be a morally autonomous agent. Instead, he or she was supposed to work through cases of conscience under the guidance of the Church. As Cajka notes, the practice of confession was supposed to bring the "law and conscience into the proper relationship between input (law) and output (correct action)." A Catholic with a badly formed conscience might be in error about, say, contraception. In that case, the Catholic was to "put away" his or her badly formed conscience and allow it to be conformed to the law as explicated by a priest in the confessional. "The system," Cajka remarks, "flowed from top to bottom, from law to conscience."

What upended this system? And why, in the late 1960s, did many, if not most, Catholics stop going to confession? In her book *Catholics and Contraception*, the historian Leslie Woodcock Tentler cites a long backdrop of anguish and resentment over the Church's teaching on family limitation, an "increasingly permeable Catholic subculture," "the period's increasingly radical individualism," a growing sense of moral autonomy among increasingly well-educated Catholic laypeople, and finally a perception that *Humanae vitae* amounted to a raw exercise in authority, without adequate rational support. Cajka adds that, in the middle of the twentieth century, priests discovered and promoted the emancipatory side of Aquinas's theory of conscience. If, as Vatican II's *Gaudium et spes* proclaimed in 1965, "conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of man," where "he is alone with God, Whose voice echoes in his depths," then it seems an individual's decisions made in conscience should not be countermanded, lest God's will for that individual be overturned. Cath-

olics thereby had both a right and an obligation to stand up both to the state and to the institutional Church.

Cajka's history has one major flaw: his highlighting, time and again, the "medieval roots" of modern Catholic conscience language obscures what is distinctively modern about it. It is true that Aquinas holds that even a conscience in error ought to be heeded: one would do wrong to act against one's conscience, even if it is wrong. But the reason for this is not that, as Cajka claims, even the erroneous conscience "generated an objectively true reality for the individual." Conscience, at least on Aquinas's theory, is not "the individual's own truth creator." Instead, one would do wrong to act against one's conscience because, in doing so, one would be choosing to do what one *takes* to be wrong, and that can never be right—even if one is wrong about what is right or wrong. The classic literary example is Mark Twain's Huck Finn. To simplify the story, let's say that Huck believes it is wrong to help the runaway slave Jim escape down the Mississippi. Huck is wrong about that, but if Huck truly believes it is wrong for him to help Jim escape, then Huck would be wrong to help Jim escape, because Huck would thereby be choosing to do what he takes to be wrong. In scholastic terminology, there are two ways to evaluate Huck's action: "formally" and "materially"—terminology that Cajka mentions but doesn't explain. When we evaluate Huck's action formally, we consider it under the description that he gave it: stealing property. That is wrong for Huck to choose to do. When we evaluate Huck's action materially, we consider it under the description that someone who knows better would give it: liberating a human being. That is right to do, but until Huck is able to "put away" his erroneous conscience, he shouldn't act against it.

In fact, *Gaudium et spes*'s account of conscience owes much more to John Henry Newman—whom Cajka does not cite—than to Aquinas. At least in some of his writings, Newman seems to treat conscience as a distinct faculty or power whereby we can apprehend what is right for us to do in our circumstances, so long as we can cut through the noise and corruptions of our culture (that is why, for Newman, listening to the Church is crucial). Ignatius of Loyola's sixteenth-century method for the discernment of spirits also must figure in this genealogy. For Aquinas, we encounter God's *law* in conscience. It is a modern innovation—though maybe one with Augustinian roots—that we can encounter God's *will* for us amid our limitations and in our complex situations, to speak of conscience as Pope Francis does in *Amoris laetitia*. (Francis is a Jesuit, after all.)

Despite this flaw, Cajka's book makes a persuasive case that Catholics, with priests leading the way, did indeed "change the terms of American freedom"—though not always for the best. As Cajka comments, his is not simply "a story of progress." Conscience clauses now protect doctors, nurses, and Catholic hospitals from having to participate in abortions, but should provision also be made for employers, like Hobby Lobby, that object to coverage for contraception under health-insurance plans, or for bakers, florists, and the like who object to selling services for gay marriages? The proliferation in recent years of so-called conscience wars within our culture wars suggests a nation that is loath to seek middle ground. Invoking conscience can be a way of not having to engage one another. Similarly, as a Church, we don't really talk about contraception any longer. Nowadays, few U.S. Catholics, including those who regularly attend Mass, agree that contraception is morally wrong or even a moral issue. Our consciences have spoken. But the bishops don't really want to hear from laypeople, and laypeople don't want to hear from them. "Conscience" has become a pact of silence.

BERNARD G. PRUSAK *is Professor of Philosophy and Director of the McGowan Center for Ethics and Social Responsibility at King's College in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania.*

Too Original

LUKE TIMOTHY JOHNSON

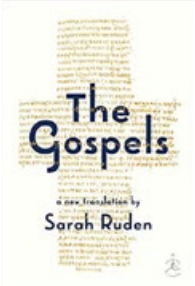
Sarah Ruden is a translator of ancient literature with considerable experience and a good reputation. She has translated from the Latin Augustine's *Confessions*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, and the *Satyricon* of Petronius, and from the Greek Plato, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and the *Homeric Hymns*—a substantial body of work.

I have not been able to locate a genuinely negative review of her earlier efforts, which gives me pause, because I have so many problems with this translation of the Gospels. On one side, I see her track record. On the other side, I read what is before me.

She tells us in the first lines of her introduction that, as a Quaker, she would like "to deal with the Gospels more straightforwardly than is customary, to help people respond to the books on their own terms." This sentence already confused me. What does she mean by "more straightforwardly"? In what manner are the King James Version or the Revised Standard Version not straightforward? And does she seek to have people respond to the books on the books' own terms or on the people's own terms? The ambiguity of referent in this clause is significant, for it points to the classic problem of all translation, namely, how to navigate between fidelity to the historical embeddedness of ancient literature and the cultural lens of present-day readers.

It is quite clear, furthermore, that Ruden is far from "straightforward" in her approach. She has a fifty-four-page introduction that includes a twenty-three-page "glossary of unfamiliar word choices in English," in which she explains and defends her often unusual decisions concerning diction, and a list of one hundred thirty "unfamiliar transliterations of important Greek names in the Greek text." Her translation itself moreover is studded with footnotes (some two hundred per Gospel) that comment on translation choices as well as a variety of historical, cultural, and religious matters. Hers is a well-armored presentation.

Before getting to more substantial issues, I should note that I found her heavy use of transliterations both distracting and off-putting. What is gained, after all, by having Farisaios rather than Pharisee, Saddoukaios rather than Sadducee, Ioudaios rather than Jew? Such transliterations make the texts of the Gospels appear stranger, it is true, but they do not make them any more intelligible to present-day readers. Perhaps the intention was to strip the proper nouns of accumulated associations, to allow a fresh look, for example, at the Farisaioi apart from the centuries of Christian anti-Semitism. But I fear the transliterations change the optics of the text without accomplishing that end.



THE GOSPELS

TRANS. BY SARAH RUDEN
Modern Library
$28 | 416 pp.

Reading further through Ruden's lengthy introduction, I became increasingly uneasy about her claim to "straightforwardness." She starts by providing a characterization of each Gospel that is, in the main, unexceptionable, if not always accurate. She gives no indication, for example, that the Gospel of Luke is (with the Acts of the Apostles) part of a two-volume composition, and she thinks that this most non-docetic narrative was influenced by Gnosticism. She similarly states that the Gospel of John has the "strongest links to Gnosticism," a view that few if any scholars after the time of Bultmann would maintain. Unless Ruden has access to evidence unavailable to the general run of competent New Testament scholars, one would have to declare these statements simply erroneous.

It is when she turns to the canonization of the Gospels, though, that her tone suddenly changes: "When, quite early," she says, "the administrators of the texts (that is, the solidifying church hierarchy) began to put more space between themselves and the audiences of the texts, the texts began to *veer out of control, like any authoritarian project*" (emphasis added). I am not sure that the last part of the sentence makes any sense, but it clearly expresses Ruden's animus, which continues: "The

Pietro Lorenzetti, *The Crucifixion*, 1340s

PURCHASE, LILA ACHESON WALLACE GIFT AND GWYNNE ANDREWS FUND, 2002/THE MET

Gospels were the first of the truly *power-hungry Truth writings*…a collection like the Gospels could arise only after the start of the *essentially modern world*" (emphasis added). Once more, a statement both confused in content and strident in tone, little mitigated by Ruden's comparing the Gospel collection unfavorably to *Das Kapital* and Nietzsche. In discussing her treatment of the Greek noun *logos*, which has universally been translated as "word" but she thinks should be rendered as "true account"—more on this later—she somehow connects the ordinary translation to notions of vengeance, and concludes, "I hope that American Christians in particular find my fresh cast of the Gospels' language helpful for this purpose."

Ruden provides, remember, a twenty-three-page list of fresh readings. She not only replaces "word" with "true account"—showing herself in this as in many other instances enamored of etymology—but has "inauguration" rather than "beginning," "stake" rather than "cross," "sky" in place of "heaven" ("Our father in the skies"), "hound" rather than "persecute" (because persecute suggests present-day situations). She avoids "righteous/righteousness" because of their "archaic and pompous ring," even though her replacements are sometimes weak. Instead of language about "resurrection," she prefers variants of "waking up" and "awakening." She has "wrong-doing" or "offense" rather than "sin," because for us, sin is a "heavily sectarian word" (whatever that means). She replaces "spirit" with "life breath"—once more etymology reigns. "Son of Man" is naturally "son of mankind" or "son of humankind." There are many more, but I add only "spread the good news" rather than evangelize (because evangelize has associations with televangelism). Given this extensive list, I found it strange that she did not find it helpful to discuss the term "glory," which in the Gospels is not only something quite other than present-day assumptions, but (especially in the Gospel of John) has a significant literary and theological role, precisely in its polyvalent range (see. e.g., John 12:28–43).

Her list of terms reveals how Ruden vacillates between a sort of linguistic primitivism ("true account" instead of "word," "stake" instead of "cross") and a desire to help contemporary readers who are either smugly content with or horribly scarred by the language of the Church derived from these texts in translation. Remarkably absent from her introduction or from the notes to her translation, however, is any awareness of the two most important historical contexts for the Gospels. First, the language of the Old Testament mediated by the Greek Septuagint was profoundly formative of the Gospels' diction (with the prophetic literature, for example, making "spirit" already much more than a "life-breath"). Second, the writings of the Christian movement antecedent to the Gospels—such as the letters of Paul—also affected the language of those compositions (making "Holy Spirit," for example, a far more richly connotative term than "Holy Life-Breath"). The first readers of the Gospels would, in short, have a rich set of linguistic associations for *pneuma*

beyond the etymologically determined translation provided by Ruden, who has John the Baptist declare, "He'll baptize you with the holy life-breath" (Mark 1:8), and who has Jesus declare in the Beatitudes, "happy are the destitute in the life-breath because theirs is the kingdom of the skies" (Matt 5:3).

On some occasions, Ruden tries to make the translation do too much, seeking to provide nuances of meaning that commentaries ordinarily supply, and ending up with a version that confuses rather than clarifies. For Mark's version of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, for example, she tries to capture Mark's unusual phrasing and ends with incoherence: "Then he ordered them to have all the people recline in communal cohorts that abutted on the verdant turf. So they reclined by fifties and hundreds, all lined up as in garden allotments" (Mark 6:40). Is this better than the stately King James: "Then he commanded them to make them all sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in ranks, in hundreds and in fifties"?

In another passage, Ruden tries to capture the double meaning of Jesus's adverb *anothen*, which incites Nicodemus's confusion in John 3:3. The term can mean either "again" or "from above," and the discourse plays on the polyvalence. She translates: "Unless someone is born anew—taking it from the top—he cannot see the kingdom of God." But "taking it from the top" is a contemporary idiom (from music and theater) that does not in the least mean what John means by "from above." Ruden's striving for original or striking expressions leads at times to simple clunkiness. Compare the simplicity of the King James Version of Mark 14:21, "but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had never been born," to Ruden's version: "But he has it coming, that specimen of mankind through whom the son of mankind is handed over. It would be better for *that* specimen of mankind if he hadn't been born." The use of the italic type for *that* in this verse reveals a translation tic. Ruden frequently relies on italics to clarify referents that her translation fails to make clear, a habit that becomes particularly distracting in her translation of John. In the seven verses of John 7:24–30, for example, she italicizes five words, in the six verses of John 8:14–19, she italicizes four words, and so forth. Similarly, in Luke 7:34, she has Jesus attacked in these terms: "Look, that guy's an *eater*—and a *drinker of wine*" rather than the non-italicized and crisper, "Look, a glutton and drunkard."

Ruden vacillates between a sort of linguistic primitivism ("stake" instead of "cross") and a desire to help contemporary readers who are either smugly content with or horribly scarred by the language of the Church derived from these texts in translation.

At other times, her over-literalness serves to confuse. She wants the reader to know that the term usually translated as "left" (in distinction from "right") is an apotropaic euphemism meaning "the blessed name." Rather than tell the reader this (not so important) fact in a note, however, she inserts it in the translation; thus, at Jesus' Crucifixion—or his hanging on the stake—she has, "and along with him two bandits were hung on stakes, one on his right, and one on his side 'with the blessed name'" (Mark 15:27; see Matt 20:23; 27:38). I am at a loss to say what this "correction" of the word "left" accomplishes.

Sometimes, her choices are disastrous. One can take exception to the King James Version of John 1:1–2 because it capitalizes "word" and "God" and supplies "He" in the second verse. But it is otherwise as close to the Greek as English can be: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God." Here is Ruden's version: "At the inauguration was the true account, and the true account was with god, and god was the true account. He was at the inauguration with god." Not only does this translation blast away all the literary resonances and theological significance of John's stately opening—as well as fundamentally altering the third phrase of the first verse—it is both pedestrian and misleading. The word "was at the inauguration with god"? Present-day readers cannot escape the sole contemporary use of the term inauguration. Was the true account at the presidential ball? Because she has botched these opening lines, furthermore, Ruden must back and fill in her translation of John 1:14, through an unjustified amplification: "The spoken word [*now* it is a word], the true account, became flesh and blood and built a shelter and sojourned among us." This is paraphrase rather than translation.

Anyone who has translated any part of the New Testament from Greek knows how difficult a task it is, so full credit to anyone who undertakes it. But in her attempt to wipe away all the accumulated meanings that she regards as intrusive or harmful in earlier translations, Ruden has also failed to take seriously enough the wise decisions made by many of her predecessors. The result is original, to be sure, but it is also something of a hot mess.

LUKE TIMOTHY JOHNSON *is emeritus Woodruff Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University, and a frequent* Commonweal *contributor. His many books include* Among the Gentiles: Greco-Roman Religion and Christianity *(Yale) and* Prophetic Jesus, Prophetic Church *(Eerdmans).*

Yours, Mine, or Ours

GRACY OLMSTEAD

UP TO HEAVEN AND DOWN TO HELL
Fracking, Freedom, and Community in an American Town

COLIN JEROLMACK
Princeton University Press
$29.95 | 336 pp.

"How the world is named and narrated," writes Dr. Norman Wirzba in his book *From Nature to Creation*, "is of the greatest theoretical and practical importance, because the way we name and narrate the world determines how we are going to live within it." Wirzba's words kept coming to mind as I read Colin Jerolmack's new book, *Up to Heaven and Down to Hell*. The book considers fracking, property rights, and community in rural Pennsylvania. But at root, the book is a poignant consideration of what we choose to name as either "mine" or "ours." Jerolmack considers how these two divergent (and often contradictory) classifications impact local governance, ecosystems, and the people who depend on them.

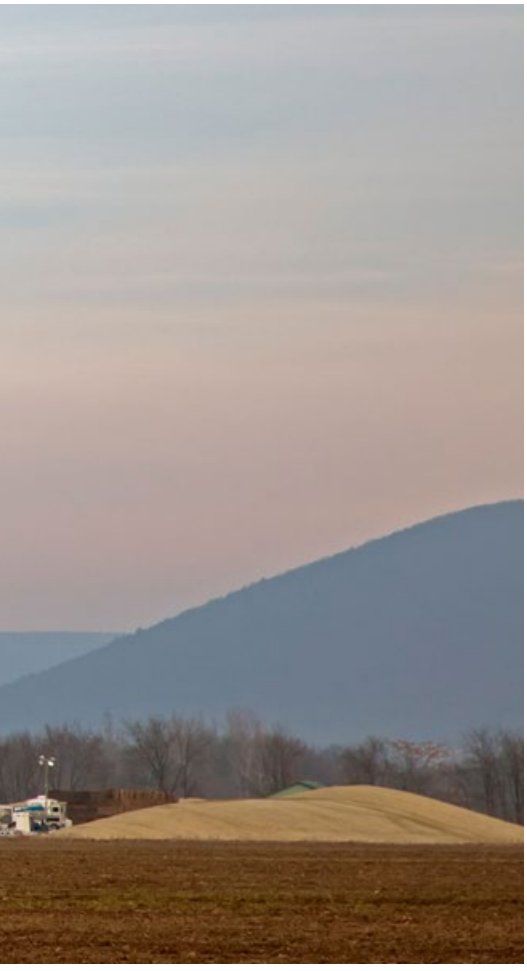
A professor of sociology and environmental studies at New York University, Jerolmack wanted to better understand the spread of fracking throughout rural areas of the United States. In discussing the subject with his students (who universally opposed fracking), he learned that none of them had set foot on a property where drilling was taking place. Neither had he. At the same time, Jerolmack noticed that many anti-fracking activists and other environmental advocates lived in urban areas, not in the rural communities that are often the sites of resource extraction, whether of coal or natural gas.

So in 2013 Jerolmack moved to Williamsport, Pennsylvania, a once-prosperous lumber town that in the mid-2000s

Hydraulic fracking at a natural gas well in rural Lycoming County, Pennsylvania

became the center of a fracking boom. Jerolmack lived there full-time for eight months, then spent six years traveling back for extended visits, documenting the rise (and ensuing fall) of fracking in the town and surrounding Lycoming County. *Up to Heaven and Down to Hell* considers fracking through the eyes of the Lycoming County residents Jerolmack came to know, offering up their specific struggles and frustrations: local townspeople who must battle gas companies for safe roads and drinking water; farmers worried about the impact of drilling on their soil; fracking enthusiasts grown disillusioned after their land (and property rights) suffer.

One such enthusiast, George Hagemeyer, is a bachelor who sees himself as a steward of his family's farmstead.



ALAMY

He enthusiastically leased his land's mineral rights to an energy company in 2013, confident in the gas industry and excited about the royalty money he would earn from participating in the "fracking lottery." By leasing his land, George "finally [broke] free of a lifetime of relative deprivation." He also exemplified a "fiery individualism" that Jerolmack sees as indicative of the region (and, indeed, of many rural regions throughout the United States). At one point, George tells Jerolmack that "it's my land. I'll do as I damn well please."

Jerolmack takes the title of his book from the Roman jurist Accursius, who once said "Cuius est solum ejus est usque ad coelom et ad infernos" ("Whoever owns the soil, it is theirs up to heaven and down to hell"). In most countries, property law is not this expansive. But Jerolmack argues that "American freehold law still comes the closest of any legal system in the world" to achieving Accursius's maxim. Choices surrounding fracking—and all the shared resources, such as water, that it affects—are entirely up to individual property owners, even though the consequences of those decisions are borne by all. Indeed, most residents in Lycoming County "saw nothing unusual or troublesome about the fact that landowners had near-total autonomy over this land use decision."

But, as Jerolmack observes, "fracking is intimate." Leasing one's mineral rights might have consequences both for the planet and closer to home. Over time, landowners throughout Lycoming County—both those who leased land and those who chose not to—began to grapple with the unintended (or at least unexpected) fallout: unsafe drinking water, radon, foul odors, heavy traffic, and roadside spills, among other consequences. Fracking impacts the quality of life in the area to such a degree that many residents began moving away.

Other locals, like Cindy Bower, are forced to negotiate a new relationship with the land they once saw as a refuge. A "silver-haired environmentalist" who moved to rural Pennsylvania in the hope of cultivating a quiet sanctuary, Cindy repeatedly turned down offers to lease her land for drilling out of concern for "the ecological damage wrought by what she described as America's century-long addiction to fossil fuels." She joined the Responsible Drilling Alliance (RDA), a local anti-fracking advocacy group, and volunteered with the Pennsylvania Environmental Defense Foundation. She even puts a conservation easement on her land. But one summer day, Cindy makes a "startling confession" to Jerolmack: despite all her condemnations of fracking, she and her husband have followed their neighbors' lead and leased their land. Resistance felt futile, Cindy explains. As the land surrounding her property, her rural refuge, was drastically impacted by drilling, "she concluded that her principled holdout did nothing to allay the devastation caused by fracking in the area." The bonus from the lease was "the only possible compensation" for her deteriorating quality of life.

Alexis de Tocqueville wrote in the nineteenth century that private-property ownership did much to cultivate Americans' "habit of always considering themselves in isolation." Still, even as the idea of "mine" abounded, there were places in the United States where a robust understanding of "ours" existed and flourished, countering the harmful tendencies of individual self-interest. Local associations—such as labor unions, farming cooperatives, mutual-aid societies, and churches—as well as robust local governments worked to keep people connected (and accountable) to each other. In Tocqueville's eyes, those mediating institutions encouraged "a constant habit of benevolence," motivating Americans to congregate and serve each other *despite* their self-interested individualism.

But as social observers like Robert Putnam have documented, mediating

Turning an environmental cause into a local cause is one way that opposing groups could find both compromise and collective action.

institutions have struggled over the past century. As part of his research, Jerolmack attended regional township meetings, board hearings, and other gatherings, many of which were about limiting the scope of fracking in the community. These forums are where private individuals might still be convinced to think collectively—where a sense of community spirit might help temper or fight a tendency toward apathy or self-interest. But these days, Jerolmack notes, "new industry-friendly laws enacted by the Republican-dominated government in Harrisburg neutered municipalities' ability to use zoning to control how fracking proceeded within their jurisdictions." The power of local governments to protect the commons was constantly circumvented by larger, stronger outside powers, policies, and regulations.

What's more, the sociological impact of fracking on the Lycoming County community "was a noticeable turning-inward among residents, a heightened sense that they were going it alone rather than in the same boat." In nearby Hughesville, five neighbors jointly sued a gas company that tainted their water, but after the gas company insisted "that they accept individual, and disparate, settlements," the group began drifting apart. "Forced into a situation where the optimal strategy was to defect rather than cooperate with one another," Jerolmack writes, "their sense of interconnectedness and mutual obligation withered."

This matters deeply to Jerolmack, because local collective action is one area in which he thinks the Left and the Right, the rural residents and the city dwellers, the progressive environmentalists and the conservative pro-business advocates might still come together. Turning an environmental cause into a *local* cause is one way that opposing groups could find both compromise and collective action.

Ralph Kisberg—a Williamsport native, environmental advocate, and co-founder of the RDA—shows us what this advocacy might look like. Though he opposes fracking, Ralph's approach is to respect both sides, in part by acknowledging the positive benefits fracking can bring. He tries to live with a foot in both worlds, but this sort of activism—and the modest, empathetic thinking that undergirds it—is unpopular in a time of fractious partisanship. Because of Ralph's determination to serve as an emissary between two disparate worldviews, he experiences severe pushback. As both "fractivism" and support for fracking become politicized, the symbolism of the fight becomes more important than actual accomplishments or reforms. By the end of the book, opposition from other RDA members and activists forces Ralph to step away from the organization he helped create.

It's not surprising, then, that both Jerolmack and Ralph struggle with frustration and disillusionment by the end of the book. Opposing fracking in a place like rural Pennsylvania is, in Ralph's words, "like being against air." Still, Jerolmack does offer some hope, both for a clean-energy future, and for a different vision of neighborliness and collective action. There could (and should) be greater regulations on an industry that often preys on individual property owners. Environmentalism could become a local cause, one which captures and revitalizes the brilliance of Tocquevillian institutions. Reinvigorated home rule could create spaces where people like George and Cindy can meet and strengthen their shared vision of stewardship. And people could be more like Ralph: working to build common ground apart from partisan feuds.

If Jerolmack's book lacks anything, it's a fuller understanding of humans as indebted and interdependent, as obliged to their communities, even those with whom they disagree. This is, in some ways, a religious argument, and thus difficult for many in our world today to understand. But it helps explain why so much of Jerolmack's book is dedicated to disagreements about private-property rights. In the United States, the way we draw property lines tempts us to think of our lived experience as segmented into neat little packages, in which each person is free to act without consequence. But as *Up to Heaven and Down to Hell* documents, each action within a local ecosystem inevitably bleeds into others, slowly helping or harming the whole. "America's legal and political privileging of individual sovereignty and property rights sanctions the usurping of the commons, frays the fabric of communities, and undermines the social contract," Jerolmack writes. He's identifying, I think, our refusal to see the world as given—and thus our inability to treat the world, or our fellow humans, with the deference and care they deserve.

Christians "have accepted an industrial and consumerist naming and narration of the world as a massive pile of 'resources' waiting to be exploited by us," Wirzba writes in *From Nature to Creation*. If we are to begin loving the earth and our neighbors better, we have to begin thinking of it differently: not as something we own, but rather as something we're given. The challenge, perhaps, is to continually ask ourselves this question: "How do I love my neighbor in the way I live, here and now?"

GRACY OLMSTEAD *is the author of* Uprooted: Recovering the Legacy of the Places We've Left Behind. *Her writing has been published in the* American Conservative, *the* New York Times, *and the* Wall Street Journal.

The Way of the WASP

BENJAMIN WILSON

At the close of the nineteenth century, a cache of papyri and ostraca began to circulate within the burgeoning, semi-legitimate market for antiquities. The scholars who eventually studied them made a bracing discovery: there had been an independent community of Jewish people on Elephantine, an island on the Nile in upper Egypt, as early as the fifth century BCE. These texts, some of the oldest extant Jewish manuscripts, suggested some jarring realities: that the Judaism practiced by these people was polytheistic; that they established a temple outside of Jerusalem, contravening Deuteronomic law; and, most shockingly, that the narratives of Moses and the Exodus from Egypt may not have been true (or at least that this community had no knowledge of them).

ANTIQUITIES

CYNTHIA OZICK
Knopf
$21 | 192 pp.

Cynthia Ozick

FRED R. CONRAD/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX

What exactly all this means for scholars of Judaism continues to be hashed out. For Cynthia Ozick, these documents are the core of the many subtexts populating her most recent book, *Antiquities*. Published in April just a few days shy of her ninety-third birthday, this novella (actually subtitled "A Story") continues in the vein of Ozick's familiar obsessions: the work of Henry James, mid-century U.S. culture, the friction between WASP America and Jewish people, and abiding questions of knowledge and deception.

Among the many stylistic and thematic inheritances Ozick absorbs from James is her interest in deceivers and the secrets they hold. While her deployment of these materials might seem to evince an allegiance to the mainstream of WASP American fiction, there actually is a deeply Jewish dimension to her wrestling with James. As Adam Kirsch observed in a 2011 essay about her in the *New Republic*, "If writing fiction is somehow forbidden to Jews, Ozick proposes, it is not because Jews cannot do it, but because they should not do it." Ozick herself vacillates on this point. In the "Forewarning" to her 1989 collection of essays, *Metaphor and Memory*, she takes the profoundly Jewish sensitivity towards the falsity of graven images and turns it on its head: "All good stories are honest and most good essays are not." The reader of *Antiquities* should hold this aphoristic utterance in mind as they make their way through its curious blend of fact and fiction.

The narrator of *Antiquities*, Lloyd Wilkinson Petrie, is an aging lawyer and one of the trustees of Temple Academy, a fictional Westchester boarding school. It was long ago shuttered and repurposed as living quarters for him

Ozick faithfully renders the fusty repression of her WASP narrator even as his recollections become increasingly suspect and unhinged.

and the other remaining trustees, all of whom were Temple students. They've been given the task of writing a memoir of their time at the school, a remit that Petrie quickly surpasses. Working furiously between April 30, 1949, and Memorial Day, 1950, he produces not a history, but, as he describes it, an "album of remembrance, a collection of small memoirs meant to stand out from the welter of the past—seven chapters of, if I may borrow an old catchphrase, emotion recollected in tranquility." What was to be no more than ten pages of Temple memories becomes a paranoiac's descent into the meaning and mysteries of the past.

Petrie is solidly WASP: his father's cousin is the famed Egyptologist Sir William Flinders Petrie, and the Temple family who founded the school are distant cousins of the Jameses—indeed, Henry's portrait is prominently displayed in one of its buildings. Ozick grounds her fictional narrative in the solid, if fading legacy of real families from the British and U.S. elite, but the figure who emerges as Petrie's great fascination is an odd outsider: Ben-Zion Elefantin. Petrie befriended this mysterious boy, admitted during a time when Temple had opened enrollment to Jewish students, after Elefantin was ostracized by the school's Christian majority. At a place where most valorize the physical rigors of sport, the two bond over chess, and it's during their matches that Elefantin dribbles out a series of cryptic facts regarding his origins: his parents are traders of some type, incessantly traveling the globe in search of artifacts, with a series of "uncles" left responsible for his schooling. This is how he arrives at Temple Academy.

As Petrie pens his increasingly deranged memoirs, Elefantin haunts him. He remembers that Elefantin was wholly unimpressed by his pedigree: "Emmet, Temple, James: all these local references, so dear to the Academy's history, and passed fervently onto its pupils, left Ben-Zion Elefantin indifferent." In one attempt to win his trust, Petrie displays artifacts his father had brought back from a youthful, errant trip to visit his "Cousin William" in Egypt, but Elefantin is indifferent to them as well. Finally, during a chaste but clearly homoerotic embrace between the two, Ben-Zion reveals the truth of himself to Petrie, which the latter preserves at length in his manuscript. Elefantin's parents, descendants of the Jews of Elephantine, pursue the antiquities they do to justify their allegiance to "Moshe our Teacher" and therefore to vindicate the true Jewishness of their offshoot community against the scholars who say otherwise:

> We, the Elefantins, hold our own truths. Our traditions and practices are far weightier than the speculations of those ignorant excavators, those papyrologists who pollute our ruined haven with their inventions and prevarications. Of our truth they make legends.... [W]e are what our memories tell us, lost stragglers, dissenters who became separated in the wilderness from that mixed throng of snivelers after the fleshpots of our persecutors. We alone were unyieldingly faithful to Moshe our Teacher, we alone never succumbed to their foolish obeisance to a gilded bovine of the barnyard.

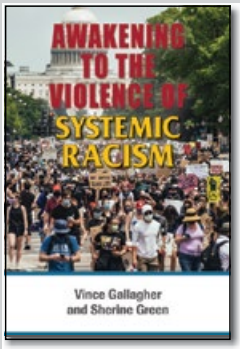
Petrie cannot understand these labyrinthine justifications. While his own anti-Semitism pales in comparison to that of the local youths who vandalized the windows of Temple Academy's chapel because its name seemed suspiciously Jewish, there are casual asides in his memoirs that reveal the ways he is both attracted to and repulsed by Judaism. When another Jewish student at Temple, his erstwhile friend Ned Greenhill, offers him an apartment in New York City, he fails to understand why. "You never put me down, Lloyd, you never called me a Hebe," he records Greenhill as replying. But then Petrie continues: "It is true that I never called him Hebe; but I thought it."

The self-consciously literary quality of Ozick's writing has been endlessly noted by critics; David Foster Wallace famously counted her, along with Cormac McCarthy and Don DeLillo, as "pretty much the country's best living fiction writers." In *Antiquities* her mimetic talents are on full display. She not only captures voices in ways that feel authentic to time, place, and social class, but she musters a welter of minutiae that validate the presentation of her protagonist's tortured mind: his disappointment with his son, who works in Hollywood; his repressed memories of a love affair with his secretary, Miss Margaret Stimmer (who he increasingly, and revealingly, refers to as Peg as the narrative unfolds); his unwavering attachment to his breeding. Ozick faithfully renders the fusty repression of her WASP narrator even as his recollections become increasingly suspect and unhinged.

Antiquities shows Ozick in full command of the particular powers that have marked her long career. The last surviving master from the age of the "New York intellectuals," she remains fully attuned to irony, deception, and the distinctly American clash between old-money elites and new-money Jews. Her attachment to bygone literary eras might limit her insights for some readers, but by reaching into that not-so-distant past she captures the eternal relevance of the secrets that stories reveal. "It is betrayal that terrifies," Petrie writes late in his remembrances. "Often and often in my cowardly memoir, I have been tempted to claim Ben-Zion Elefantin's voice." What Petrie does not realize, or cannot admit, is that he has for decades remained in the grip of the authorial power of his wayward classmate.

BENJAMIN WILSON *teaches and writes in Louisville, Kentucky.*

Fall Books from Paulist Press

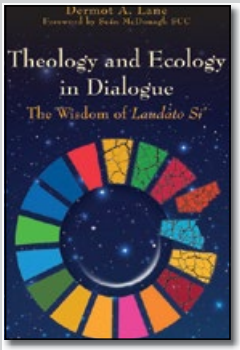


AWAKENING TO THE VIOLENCE OF SYSTEMIC RACISM

Vince Gallagher and Sherine Green; foreword by Rasheda L. Weaver

Awakening bears witness to the most egregious disparities between African American people and white people caused by the structural injustice inherent in virtually every institution in the United States.

5566-8 $24.95 PB



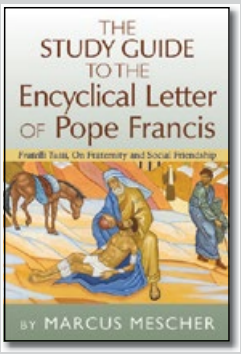
THE STUDY GUIDE TO THE ENCYCLICAL LETTER OF POPE FRANCIS

Fratelli Tutti, On Fraternity and Social Friendship

Marcus Mescher

Fratelli Tutti sets out the pope's vision for a postpandemic world. This study edition helps readers pray with the text, reflect on it and look for connections with the canon of Catholic social teaching, and ultimately leads us toward action that builds "communities of belonging and solidarity."

5565-1 $19.95 PB



THEOLOGY AND ECOLOGY IN DIALOGUE

The Wisdom of _Laudato Si'_

Dermot A. Lane; foreword by Seán McDonagh, SCC

Challenges theology to re-imagine who we are, who the Spirit is, who Christ is, where creation is going, and what is the role of liturgy in society—all in the glare of the climate crisis.

5561-3 $29.95 PB

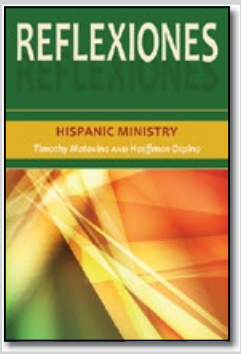
REFLEXIONES

Hispanic Ministry

Timothy Matovina and Hosffman Ospino

The authors brings together their best insights about ministry with Hispanic Catholics in the United States and help us to understand important realities that define the U.S. Hispanic Catholic experience today.

5548-4 $19.95 PB



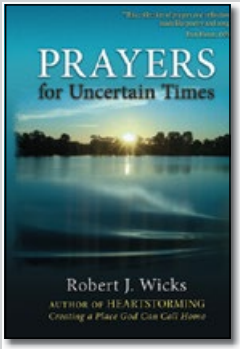
KARL BARTH

Spiritual Writings

Edited by Ashley Cocksworth and W. Travis McMaken

A selection, with introduction and commentary, of spiritual writings by one the most significant Protestant theologians of the twentieth century.

0654-7 $49.95 HC



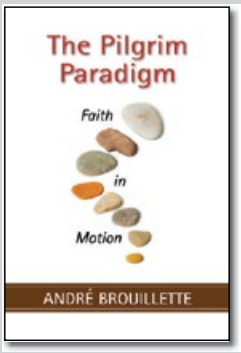
THE PILGRIM PARADIGM

Faith in Motion

André Brouillette

This book aims to explore what pilgrimage has to teach about God, the faithful, and the Church, thereby challenging and enriching theology.

5541-5 $29.95 PB



PRAYERS FOR UNCERTAIN TIMES

Robert J. Wicks

A collection of prayers, both previously published and new, that offer hope, encouragement, and direction in these volatile times. A *vademecum* from a popular, distinguished author.

5550-7 $14.95 PB

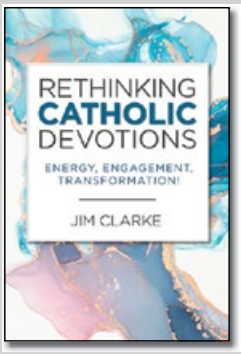
RETHINKING CATHOLIC DEVOTIONS

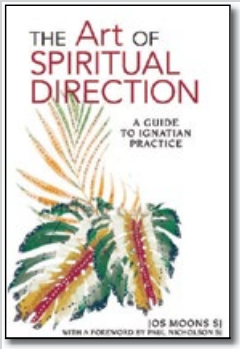
Energy, Engagement, Transformation!

Jim Clarke

A wide-ranging discussion of popular devotionalism as practiced in the U.S. Catholic Church, with brief history of how devotions arose and ways to rethink them for the 21st century.

5533-0 $17.95 PB





THE ART OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

A Guide to Ignatian Practice

Jos Moons, SJ

A concrete, practical book about spiritual accompaniment, resembling a toolbox with a user's manual. Using examples and case studies, the author demonstrates how the tools he outlines may be put to good effect.

5567-5 $24.95 PB

Available at bookstores or from Paulist Press

Orders: 1-800-218-1903 • fax 1-800-836-3161 • www.paulistpress.com

Silence & Contradiction

SHARON MESMER

Twenty years ago, I visited the Convento de San Miguel in Úbeda, where Spanish poet San Juan de la Cruz died in 1591. I'd hoped that witnessing the last home of the medieval Carmelite friar and doctor of the Church (his official title is *doctor mysticus*, or mystical doctor) would be revelatory. A Catholic poet myself, I'd read every translation of his elegant, enigmatic work. But even with my limited grasp of Spanish, I could tell the translators had taken too many liberties and lost his original meanings, or had been too literal and lost his music. As I crossed into a roped-off room to touch what had been his writing table, I didn't know what I expected would happen. Doing so yielded nothing—just like reading those translations. A bit disappointed, I descended an old stone staircase and followed the gift-shop signs to the exit.

While the poetry of San Juan de la Cruz is admired by poets and lovers of poetry for its mystical beauty, it often gets the side-eye from religious. Thomas Moore, a one-time Carmelite himself and author of *Care of the Soul*, among other books, once wrote:

> One of my Pastors once remarked to me, with a grimace that bordered on pain, "St. John of the Cross? I cannot get anything out of him. Even at the Seminary we said 'What is it that he is saying?' Is he saying anything at all to us?" Sadly, I must admit that I often meet people who display similar reactions. Why? What causes people to be so turned off by this saint, while others become so turned on?

The saint's poems, written more than four hundred years ago and considered the apex of Spanish mystical literature, seem to forget the familiar, easy, and convenient, to slip into darkness and unknowing to find God. They are written in a highly symbolic, sometimes sensual language. It's no wonder translators got it wrong. But I was so impressed by the new version by poets María Baranda and Paul Hoover that I emailed them to ask how they'd managed to keep San Juan's paradoxes intact without adding words and ideas.

"We had to deal with many things," Baranda answered. "The linguistic signs, the doctrinal/religious meanings. There were some words that we couldn't touch: 'soul,' 'Beloved.' We were trying not to interpret, but to keep certain words as they were."

Consider this lesson in apophatic theology (also known as the "*via negativa*" or "negative way") from San Juan's poem "The Mount of Perfection," included in this translation:

> To come to what you are not
> go where you are not.
> When you observe something,
> stop throwing yourself at everything.
> To come to the all in all
> abandon the all in all.
> And when you come to have everything,
> have it with nothing to have.

Or this paradox, from "Other Verses to the Divine": "I was fallen so much, so much, / that I went so high, so high, / that I captured my prey."

"Translation is difficult in the first place," Hoover echoed, "because you always have to give up something. With San Juan, we had to give up the beauty of his cadence and rhymes. Trying to perfect the rhyme would twist his meaning."

That beauty can be seen in the skillful interaction of rhymes and off-rhymes in the saint's sensual "Dark Night":

> En mi pecho florido,
> que entero para él solo se guardaba,
> allí quedó dormido,
> y yo le regalaba,
> y el ventalle de cedros aire daba.

THE COMPLETE POEMS OF SAN JUAN DE LA CRUZ

TRANS. BY MARÍA BARANDA AND PAUL HOOVER
Milkweed Editions
$18 | 120 pp.

ALBUM/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Engraving of San Juan de la Cruz, 1890

Without those rhymes, though, the meaning still shines through:

On my flowering breast,
reserved only for him,
there he fell asleep,
and I gave him the gift,
and the breeze of the cedars blew.

San Juan composed "Dark Night," as well as his other great work, "Spiritual Canticle," in 1578 while imprisoned for eight months in a filthy ten-by-six-foot cabinet in the Carmelite priory in Toledo. A group of his Carmelite brethren, virulently opposed to the reforms that Juan and his mentor and protector, St. Teresa of Ávila, proposed for their order, had kidnapped him. Unable to stand up, he was lashed regularly and fed sparingly. But light broke through darkness: one night he heard a *villancico*—popular ballad—sung by a passerby outside. This song-form provided the container for San Juan's complex poems about God's presence-in-absence, and lends a postmodern, appropriated quality to his work.

"Many of the poems were written using *contrafactum*," Baranda noted, "a Latin term which means the substitution of one text for another without substantial change to the music."

Baranda pointed out literary techniques like rhymed quatrains, and forms like the *letrilla* (a Spanish lyric poem of eight syllables or fewer with a one-line chorus, called an *estribillo*, at the end of each stanza):

Entreme donde no supe,
y quedeme no sabiendo,
toda sciencia transcendiendo

I entered where I didn't know,
and I remained not knowing,
going beyond all knowledge.

"San Juan mixed popular and classic in the best way," she told me. "Like a wave that comes to our shore with fresh ideas, beautiful sounds. There were some words that meant other things in those days, thus we needed to be careful. But his poems don't sound old. They are alive."

Juan's familiarity with poetry and poetic forms was part of his extraordinary lived experience of darkness-in-light. He was born Juan de Yepes y Álvarez in 1542 in Fontiveros, near Ávila. His family were *conversos,* Spanish or Portuguese Jewish converts to Catholicism during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. (The Spanish Inquisition, the most infamous of the Church's three inquisitions, was established to root out heretics among *conversos* and *moriscos*—Muslims similarly forced to convert under pain of deportation.) Juan's father, Gonzalo, gave up a family fortune to marry an impoverished orphan, Catalina Álvarez, whose talent was weaving fine silk with linen or cotton into *buratto* for the wealthy. Gonzalo's death three years after Juan's birth plunged Catalina and her other two sons into such destitution that the oldest son died of malnutrition. Juan was sent to an orphanage. In medieval Andalusia, this inauspicious beginning might have doomed him, but at the orphanage he learned to read and write. When he was ten, the staff at the hospital where he worked collecting alms noticed his abilities and sent him to a *colegio* (grammar school) run by the recently founded Society of Jesus. There he studied the works of Virgil, Horace, and Seneca, and his knowledge of Latin opened the way for his acceptance to the University of Salamanca. Like his mother's *buratto*, the poems that Juan wrote while imprisoned in Toledo—as well as the events of his life that lead up to that moment—blended the fine silk of divine mystery with the common cotton of medieval life.

In August 1578, eight months after being taken prisoner, San Juan broke free by crawling naked out a small window and seeking refuge at a nearby convent established by St. Teresa, his mentor. His experience of finding freedom in darkness—of not merely having faith despite the most dire circumstances, but of finding God in the circumstances themselves—is reflected in his most beautiful lines. From "Dark Night":

Oh night, you guide me!,
oh night, kinder than the dawn!,
oh night that joined
Beloved with beloved,
beloved in the Beloved transformed!

From "Songs Written About an Ecstacy of High Contemplation":

The more that one knows,
the less he understands,
that it is the darkest cloud
that elucidates the night

From "Other Verses to the Divine":

When I climbed ever higher
my vision was dazzled,
and the strongest conquest
was made in the dark

"The strongest poetry communicates silence and contradiction," Hoover said. "Ironically, it must use words to do so. Direct statements of truth fall flat. That's why poetry is so useful, with its fragments and incompletions, sometimes seeming to be nonsense. They are stirred and joined by an intimation."

"This is a translation done with much respect," Baranda wrote, "because his words are not just words, but the way God communicated with him. There is something else—the ineffable. Did we get it? Did we really touch the inner power of the poems?"

I didn't touch the ineffable when I put my hands on the saint's writing table. But midway down that old stone staircase I involuntarily turned to a small window to my left that looked out onto an airy courtyard. As I did so, I realized that Juan had (possibly) also made that same involuntary head movement whenever he went up or down those steps. I felt like I'd stepped into an echo of his energy—a still-vibrating time-space stamp. Reading this revelatory new translation, I get the same feeling. ✡

SHARON MESMER's *essays and interviews have appeared in the* New York Times, New York Magazine/The Cut, *and the* Paris Review. *Her most recent poetry collection is* Greetings from My Girlie Leisure Place *(Bloof Books). She teaches creative writing at New York University and the New School.*

Love, Actively

Reading *The Brothers Karamazov* in 2021

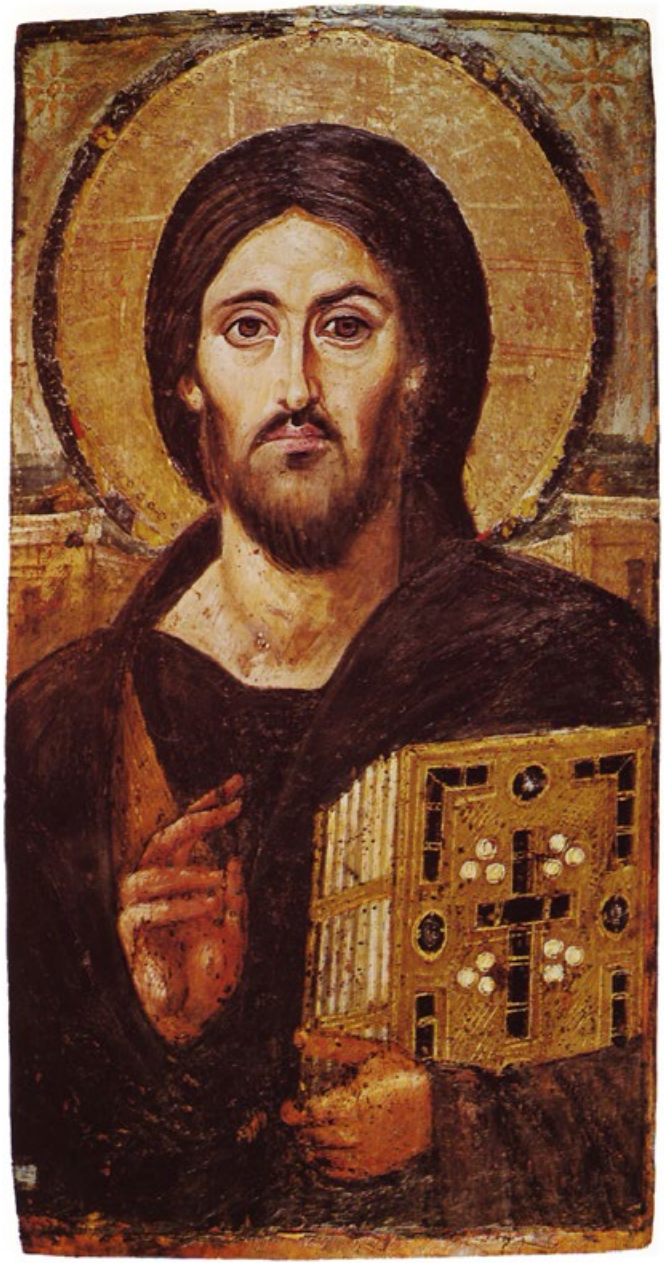
PAUL J. CONTINO

"We've become better people since we read *The Karamazovs*!" Readers spoke those words to Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky just months before he died. Since then, many have echoed that testimony, including Pope Francis, who has attested that "for all of us" Dostoevsky stands as "an author that we must read and reread due to his wisdom." This year, we celebrate the author's two hundredth birthday. What better time to reread *The Brothers Karamazov,* Dostoevsky's last and greatest novel, or discover it for the first time?

The novel's young hero, Alyosha, thinks he's called to become a monk. The local monastery serves him as an escape from his torn, tormented family. But early on Alyosha's mentor, the Elder Zosima, counsels him to leave, urging him instead to marry and become "a monk in the world." In the course of the novel, whose plot revolves around the murder of Alyosha's father and the subsequent trial of his older brother, Alyosha fulfills that vocation by attending to others in the "harsh and dreadful" work of "active love." As opposed to "love in dreams," active love (according to Zosima) entails "labor and fortitude." It's the slow, steady practice of small, often unacknowledged acts of attentiveness toward others.

Zosima exemplifies such love, as does Alyosha—especially in his relations with his anguished brothers, Dmitri and Ivan, and their lovers, Grushenka and Katerina. His down-to-earth ministry, which I call his "incarnational realism," helps him emerge for readers as an image of Christ. In Zosima's teaching, the "precious image of Christ" prevents wayward humanity from remaining "altogether lost, as was the human race before the flood." And that's just what Alyosha does for the other characters in the novel: he's a vehicle, but also an agent, of divine love.

Zosima's use of the word "image" is significant. It recalls the ancient tradition of icon painting, so vital to the Orthodox Christian tradition. In 451 CE, the Council of Chalcedon had issued the definitive statement on the Incarnation, asserting that Christ is both man and God, finite and infinite, "without separation or confusion." This well-known icon of Christ Pantocrator, housed in St. Catherine's Monastery at Sinai (in present-day Egypt), was painted about a century after that council—and it makes its theological definition visible.



Icon of Christ, 6th century, St. Catherine's Monastery, Sinai

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Christ offers redemption for all, but in turn we must respond to Christ's work as synergoi, *fellow workers, laboring in active love with each particular person we encounter.*

The icon itself deserves close attention. Observe the asymmetry of Jesus's face, and pay particular attention to the eyes. From the viewer's left, Jesus's face is open and receptive, his eye projecting tenderness, acceptance, and mercy. Here is the redemptive Christ, whom Alyosha affirms when Ivan insists that anyone who tortures an innocent child is beyond forgiveness. In that scene, which occurs early in the novel, Alyosha disputes his brother's disbelief "suddenly, with flashing eyes": "There is a Being," Alyosha declares, "who can forgive everything, all *and for all*, because he gave his innocent blood for all and everything."

On the viewer's right side, though, Jesus's face is different. His lip turns slightly down, and his eye seems to scrutinize and judge the viewer. Here *we* are responsible for the violence that blights our world. Jesus's eye interrogates: What have we done and what have we left undone? Speaking earlier with Alyosha, Zosima had claimed that "there is only one means of salvation": everyone must be "responsible *for all* men's sins." The paradox lies at the heart of both icon and novel: the viewer and the reader feel both release from their burdens and the weight of Christ's yoke.

We are each responsible to all and for all: Zosima's mantra draws on the Eucharistic Prayer from the Orthodox *Divine Liturgy*: "Thine own of thine own we offer unto Thee, *on behalf of all and for all.*" The phrase—and its echoes in the utterances of Alyosha and Zosima—helps us understand how salvation works in Dostoevsky's novel. Christ offers redemption *for all*, but in turn we must respond to Christ's work as *synergoi*, fellow workers, laboring in active love with each particular person we encounter.

But what about the undeniable presence of evil in the world? Ivan famously rejects the idea of a God who allows innocents to suffer. Yet even in his bitterness, he affirms Christ as "the Word to Which the universe is striving." This is, in a sense, the core of the novel's theological vision: the Word creates, enters, and sustains the world, *for all* and *in all* its groaning, travail, and sin. What makes this possible (and what makes suffering bearable) is divine grace. "In contact with other mysterious worlds," humans can perform the work of justice, helping the weak and confronting the powerful.

In *A Secular Age*, the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor argues that modern believers must "struggle to recover a sense of what the Incarnation means." For Taylor, and for the Catholic tradition of which he is a part, this sense includes an understanding of suffering, which has meaning by virtue of its participation in the salvific suffering of Christ.

Such an understanding remains a live option today. We are free to accept willingly—or to reject willfully—God's invitation to active love. If accepted, a new possibility emerges:

"Human suffering, even of the most meaningless type, may become associated with Christ's act, and…become a locus of renewed contact with God, an act which heals the world. The suffering is given a transformative effect, by being offered to God. A catastrophe thus can become part of a providential story." As has been the case for many Christians, Taylor's vision has been sustained by Dostoevsky's.

The Brothers Karamazov unflinchingly represents a world wrung by "human suffering." But, as the Sinai icon helps illuminate, a "providential story" can be discerned in that world. Both the ancient icon and the modern novel suggest that the person who would conform to "the precious image of Christ" must nurture both trust in divine grace and the responsive work of love. To borrow a word from one of Dostoevsky's most lucid commentators, Mikhail Bakhtin, the icon calls its viewer to respect the *unfinalizability*, the freedom of the other person. We must retain a hope that a sinful person (one like ourselves) may change and surprise. But it also insists that for all a person's possibilities, she or he must embody their intentions in concrete deeds. Such is the work that Alyosha takes on in the novel. Such is the work that the novel invites us to enact in our own ordinary lives.

PAUL J. CONTINO *is Professor of Great Books at Pepperdine University. He is the author of* Dostoevsky's Incarnational Realism: Finding Christ among the Karamazovs *(Cascade 2020).*

VILLANOVA UNIVERSITY

IS PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE

Ellen Mosley-Thompson, PhD

Distinguished University Professor in Geography (Atmospheric Science) and Senior Research Scientist in the Byrd Polar and Climate Research Center at The Ohio State University

Lonnie G. Thompson, PhD

Distinguished University Professor in the School of Earth Sciences and Senior Research Scientist in the Byrd Polar and Climate Research Center at The Ohio State University

THE FIFTIETH AND FIFTY-FIRST RECIPIENTS OF THE

MENDEL MEDAL

The Mendel Medal is awarded to outstanding scientists who have done much by their painstaking work to advance the cause of science, and, by their lives and their standing before the world as scientists, have demonstrated that between true science and true religion there is no intrinsic conflict.

The 2020 Mendel Medal lecture

"Rapidly Changing Climate and Retreating Glaciers: Past, Present, and Future Societal Impacts"

FRIDAY, October 29, 2021 • 2 p.m.

Villanova University • Villanova Room, Connelly Center

Villanova University: Founded by the Augustinians in 1842

villanova.edu/mendelmedal

PAST MENDEL MEDAL RECIPIENTS

Dr. Francis S. Collins
Director, National Center for Human Genome Research

Dr. George V. Coyne, SJ
Director Emeritus, Vatican Observatory

Dr. Michael E. DeBakey
Chancellor Emeritus, Baylor College of Medicine

Dr. Petrus J.W. Debye
Nobel Laureate in Chemistry

Rev. P. Teilhard de Chardin, SJ
Paleontologist, National Geological Survey of China

Dr. Peter C. Doherty
Nobel Laureate in Medicine, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital

Dr. Sylvia A. Earle
American marine biologist, explorer, author and lecturer

Dr. Paul Farmer
Medical Anthropologist, Harvard Medical School

Dr. Anthony S. Fauci
Director, National Institute of Allergy & Infectious Diseases, National Institute of Health

Dr. Sylvester J. Gates
Physics, University of Maryland

Dr. Ralph Hirschmann
Bioorganic Chemistry, University of Pennsylvania

Dr. Brian K. Kobilka
Nobel Laureate in Chemistry, Stanford University School of Medicine

Dr. W. Ian Lipkin
Director, Center for Infection and Immunity, Columbia University

Dr. Victor A. McKusick
Founder, Human Genome Organization, The Johns Hopkins University

Dr. Olufunmilayo Olopade
Global Health Director, Center for Clinical Cancer Genetics

Dr. Veerabhadran Ramanathan
Atmospheric and Climate Sciences

Dr. Peter Raven
Director, Missouri Botanical Garden

Dr. Holmes Rolston, III
Philosophy, Colorado State University

Dr. Janet Rowley
Human Genetics, University of Chicago

Dr. Philip A. Sharp
Nobel Laureate in Medicine, MIT

Dr. Charles H. Townes
Nobel Laureate in Physics, University of California, Berkeley

Dr. Robert G. Webster
Virology, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital

Dr. Ahmed H. Zewail
Nobel Laureate for developments in femtoscience, Chemistry, Cal Tech

Learn with us. *Lead* with us.

At Fordham's Graduate School of Religion and Religious Education, we educate in faith to prepare innovative and adaptive leaders for solidarity, service, and justice.

Degree Programs

- Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.)
- Ph.D. in Religion and Practice
- M.A. in Christian Spirituality
- M.A. in Pastoral Care
- M.A. in Pastoral Studies
- M.A. in Religious Education
- M.A. in Pastoral Mental Health Counseling

Advanced Certificate Programs

- Christian Spirituality
- Faith Formation
- Latinx Ministry
- Spiritual Direction
- Supervision

Online and on-campus program options are available.

Tuition waivers of 50 percent are offered to qualified faith-based leaders and church workers.

FORDHAM
THE JESUIT UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
Graduate School of Religion and Religious Education

Fordham.edu/gre
718.817.4800
GREadmit@fordham.edu